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Bath decision could matter

Next week, what happens in the Swallow Lansdown Grove Hotel in Bath may have a major implications for bus and coach operation.

The perceived problem Bath has with open-top sightseeing buses - largely historic, now that City Sightseeing is the only operator - has led the council to apply for a Traffic Regulation Condition, which will if successful curb the number, type and emissions of the open-top fleet. The ripples, should it be successful, will be felt well beyond open-topping.

Whichever way you look at this application, it's council regulation of what should be an open market for sightseeing tours. I can, of course, see why Bath and North East Somerset Council has taken this decision; the bus traffic round the Georgian terraces had, at one time, become intrusive.

The result is a demand that open-top touring be restricted. Operators will have to run near-new vehicles with headphone commentaries but, more importantly, the TRC suggests a restriction not only in the total number of buses but the number each operator can run.

Since the TRC was drafted, things have moved on. Bath City Sightseeing now has the city to itself. If the TRC sticks, it will be limited to six of a possible 10 vehicles. If it ends up with all 10, nobody else will be able to run against it.

Martin Curtis at Bath City Sightseeing doubts whether even 10 will satisfy tourist demand for open-top tours. And I suspect, as does Mr Curtis, that there may be some competition issues with this TRC.

Beyond open-top sightseeing, it's not inconceivable that other councils may take the view that other areas of competitive operation are becoming intolerable, and look at TRCs as a form of regulation for other services.

Yes, the public inquiry which inevitably results will hopefully ensure fair play, but I suspect that the outcome of what is a fairly reasonable TRC application may be councils who look at TRCs in a completely different light

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

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Bendy bus off to a rocky start

First of the ftrs goes on the road in York... but breakdown en route snares the service

York's 'tram-on-tyres' ftr service went live on Monday, with City Council Leader Steve Galloway standing in at the launch for reshuffled ex-Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling.

The launch day was marred by delays - of up to an hour at one point - and bunching, following the breakdown of a non-ftr service at a busy junction in York City Centre, and some evidence of driver inexperience.

Galloway and Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive of First Group, congratulated each other on having the service up and running a year after Darling's 2005 unveiling of the ftr vehicle.

A fleet of 11 hi-tech, articulated single-decker Wrightbus StreetCars, costing £300,000 each, is now operating York's service 4 along a specially-remodelled 7.66km east-west corridor, linking the city centre with the affluent commuter suburb of Acomb and York University.

The City Council, operator First Group's partner in the scheme, expects it to deliver a 30% increase in ridership and a 10% modal shift away from car use over five to six years after investing £1.3 million in infrastructural upgrades.

Waiting to pick up his next service at the Railway Station stop on Monday, freshly-retrained 'pilot'/driver 'JC' described the driving experience as "quite extraordinary". Trainer Bryan Price found the improved route "much easier to drive", though he would have preferred fewer speed bumps.

The choice of York's service 4 for the UK's first ftr deployment (Leeds is next in line) emerged from its being one of the UK's busiest, and from the character of the communities at either end of its route. Acomb, to the west, clusters a number of residential areas with high levels of car ownership, and the partners hope that the quality of the ftr and its ride will encourage more of them to leave their cars at home.

Meanwhile, the University, to the east was already generating large numbers of student passengers for the pre-ftr service. Research by First indicated students as being among the likeliest early adopters of M-ticketing.

Moir Lockhead and Steve Galloway shake on the new deal for York passengers. Below: OO05 FTR ready for launch

The aftermath of Sunday's killer coach rampage in Dublin. One woman died and a number of people were seriously injured

Killer coach

Driver goes on 90 minute rampage, killing one

A 36 year old driver employed by Dualway Coaches in Dublin has been remanded in custody charged with causing death by dangerous driving following a 90 minute rampage in which he injured more than a dozen motorists, and killed a 61 year old woman.

Coach driver Peter Clarke, from Tallaght, had taken the three month old 53-seater Marcopolo coach from the depot of his employer Dualway Coaches without permission on Sunday May 5, and went missing for several hours before being flagged down by the firm's operations director David McConn. McConn asked him to turn off the engine and leave the vehicle whereupon Mr Clarke allegedly tried to run him down. McConn then called Gardai and reported the vehicle as stolen.

A full scale Garda response was mobilised and the coach was chased along busy roads in south Dublin, during which time it collided with dozens of cars, drove for nearly 2km along a section of light rail track, smashed through several Garda roadblocks, and travelled along the wrong side of the busy Naas dual-carrigeway, bulldozing through stationary traffic and dragging a woman motorist 100 metres along the road to her death.

Gardai deployed stingers at several locations to try to stop the vehicle. When these proved unsuccessful shots were fired in an attempt to deflate the tyres. One Garda car which attempted to stop the coach was pushed sideways along the road for 700m with three Gardai inside, who later had to be cut from the wreckage and taken to hospital.

After more than an hour and a half, Clarke returned to the Dualway depot at Rathcoole, smashing through steel security gates before crashing into the parked cars of other Dualway employees and finally coming to rest wedged onto an earthen embankment.

When Gardai moved in to make an arrest, Clarke allegedly emerged from the vehicle armed with an axe and a set of knuckledusters, injuring two Gardai before finally being subdued.

Speaking on behalf of

Dualway, David McConn expressed the shock felt by the employees and management of the company, and extended his sympathy to the family and friends of the dead woman and the other injured victims.

"We have no idea why this happened," he stated. "There was no ongoing dispute, argument, or history of bad feeling with this driver. As this has now become a criminal investigation, I can add no further comment at the moment"

It's understood that Mr. Clarke had worked with Dualway for a little over two years.

The incident caused massive disruption to traffic in south Dublin, and tram services on the LUAS Red Line were suspended for much of the day.

Appearing at Kilmainham District Court the following morning, Clarke, who had injuries to his head and a black eye, remained silent during the brief hearing. No application for bail was made and the presiding judge recommended medical and psychiatric investigations.

Darling goes in reshuffle

Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling has been replaced by fellow Scot, Douglas Alexander MP, a member of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

The cabinet reshuffle comes in the wake of a difficult period for the government, after months of scandals involving ministers, and a poor showing at the local elections. But many observers say the reshuffle has been in the planning for sometime, which could explain why junior transport minister Karen Buck, who resigned in March, was not replaced until now. Gillian Merron MP takes over her post.

Mr Alexander joined the Labour Party when he was 15. Now the MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire South, Mr Alexander is a former lawyer who studied at Edinburgh University and in the USA at Pennsylvania University. He entered Parliament in 1997 and first became a minister in 2001. He has held ministerial positions at Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The departure of Alistair Darling is seen as a blow to the industry: "Apart from anything else, he was valued for having been there for a long time," said Simon Posner, the deputy director general of CPT.

"Mr Darling understood the brief, and was more keen on getting things done than on getting headlines. So yes, we are sad to see him go." Mr Darling has joined the Department for Trade and Industry.

Mr Posner said that Mr Alexander is believed to be a close ally of the Chancellor, and seen as one of New Labour's rising stars.

Gillian Merron MP has been the MP for Lincoln since 1997. She becomes Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport after two years as the Lords Commissioner to HM Treasury.

New Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander

■ The Transport Select Committee has published a critical report into the working of the Department for Transport, and called for an end to the Quality Contract scheme.

Its Department for Transport's 2005 Annual Report, published last week, says: "Our overall impression is of a well intentioned but sluggish and sometimes muddled Department which needs to 'raise its game' if it is to meet the considerable challenge of leading clear improvements to UK transport infrastructure. Inspirational leadership is needed at official level, but appears lacking. This needs to change."

The Committee says it will invite the Secretary of State for Transport to give evidence on next year's report and that: "We expect the Department's potential for focused and energetic leadership in pursuing its aim of 'better transport for all' to be more clearly realized."

On buses, the report says: "Lessons from the success of London's bus strategy must be identified and, where appropriate, applied throughout England and Wales. The Secretary of State has now acknowledged that the bus Quality Contract scheme has failed. It must be discontinued. We recommend that the Department grants the additional powers to local authorities to enable them to have more effective control over local public transport, and buses in particular."

Briefly

Mike Parker, the director general of Nexus, will leave the post in August after 12 years. He will work for a small private company in the area. He says: "After 35 years in public transport, and the public sector, it is time to move on and try something different."

The SMMT published its Motor Industry Facts – 2006 at the CV Show, showing that: crude oil costs rose by nearly 50% last year; that CV production broke the 206,000 barrier for only the second time since 1999; that new CV registrations are up nearly 40% in five years, and that registrations of buses and coaches have risen by 14.8% since 1996. The document can be downloaded for free at *www.smmt.co.uk*.

The new EU Driving Time and Rest Limits applicable from April 11, 2007 have been published. The changes cover driving time, breaks, daily rest, spreadover and weekly rest. There are a number of points still to be clarified. See a full report in next week's *CBW*.

The latest DfT Road Casualty figures show a continued decline in death and serious injuries, despite increasing traffic on the roads. But the government says it will commission more research into the accuracy of the figures after a report by the Transport Research Laboratory suggests that there may be 2.76 times more seriously injured casualties, and 1.70 times slight casualties due to under-reporting, under-recording and misclassification. The final figures for 2005 will be published in June.

TfL has postponed its plans to add a cashless payment function to the Oystercard. After consulting with potential partners it says the plans are too complex to put into operation now. TfL says it will look at the idea again in the future.

BUSES

Minibus driver walks free

Cushing fined £250 and banned for six months after fatal Welsh crash

Christopher Cushing, the driver of the minibus which crashed in Wales last year killing a school girl, has been found not guilty of dangerous driving.

Christopher Cushing was instead found guilty of careless driving, banned from driving for six months and fined £250.

The verdict has lead to calls for greater control over school bus drivers, and more clarity in the rules governing school transport.

The prosecution alleged at his trial in Cardiff that he had been driving too fast and swerving to frighten one of the children on board. But Cushing told the jury that he had been driving normally and his testimony was backed up by the escort on board.

The accident happened on a hill between Hafodyrynys and Crumlin, Wales in May 2005. The bus was carrying 10 school children and the escort, Elaine Arthur, when Cushing lost control. The vehicle cut across three lanes of traffic before hitting a car and overturning. Jasmine Allen, 12, was killed. Cushing told police that the accident was caused by defective steering on the vehicle and stones on the road, but a further vehicle inspection by VOSA - which delayed the start of the trial - found there were no faults on the vehicle.

Cushing told the jury: "As I came round the corner I felt the steering going awful light and I said to Elaine 'The bus doesn't feel right'. The bus was pulling to one side, towards the right side. The steering did not respond as well as it did usually. I turned the wheel to try and correct it." He says the next thing he remembers is climbing out of the bus as it lay on its side on the road.

The judge, Mr Justice Nigel Davies, told Cushing: "You will have to live with the fact that the girl is dead as a consequence of your driving. You will also have to deal with the distress caused not only to her family but the other children on the bus."

Jasmine Allen's parents say they are disappointed with the verdict,

Driver Christopher Cushing

while Gwent Police issued a statement praising the "courage" of the children who gave evidence. A community leader says: "The local authority should be monitoring the situation much more closely than they are already. They should be making sure that the drivers of all the buses taking our kids to school should be properly monitored."

David Cunningham-Jones, father of Stuart Cunningham-Jones who was killed in a school bus accident in 2004 says: "We need clarity first and foremost for everybody responsible for school trips. The problem with the trips at the moment is there are too many grey areas - we need it in black and white."

The Welsh Assembly is currently enacting the recommendations of the Stuart Cunningham-Jones' enquiry.

Cushing was driving the bus as a favour to Jason Brewer, the owner of A1 Minibus Hire, and was not paid. Mr Brewer was earlier found guilty of allowing Cushing to drive without the correct licence and insurance.

Bus war coming in Sheffield?

Competition between First and Stagecoach is hotting up in Sheffield.

After acquiring Yorkshire Traction last year, Stagecoach chief executive Brian Souter warned that the company would be radically overhauling bus services in the city.

Last week's announcement that Stagecoach would be offering a travelcard which could be used on its bus and Supertram services; that it would be re-branding its Yorkshire Terrier subsidiary, and adding new routes and increased frequencies, is seen as the first shot in what could become a major bus war in the city.

Stagecoach Sheffield managing director Paul Lynch says: "When local people see what the new network has to offer, we are confident they will vote with their feet."

Meanwhile, Brandon Jones, commercial director for First South Yorkshire told the BBC: "As the leading bus operator in South Yorkshire we offer customers wide opportunities for travel across an extensive network, seven days a week, early until late from less than £2 per day.

"We will continue to invest to improve service for our customers and build on our performance as top bus operator for reliability." He says the company may extend price promotions already being trialled on some routes.

One of Stagecoach's recent additions to its fleet in Yorkshire

Stagecoach won a major award at last week's Scotland plc Awards 2006. It carried off the Braehead for Business Award for Innovation, after being runner-up last year.

"We are delighted Stagecoach has been recognised with such a prestigious award," says Stagecoach Group chief executive Brian Souter. "Stagecoach continues to lead the way with new ideas on how to attract more people to public transport."

"Innovation, supported by long-term investment and strong marketing, has been central to the success of our growth strategy. Even after more than 25 years in business, we are still developing new ideas and new products." Cairn Energy and Letts Filofax Group were also among the winners.

A Trueform service engineer in action

Trueform in big shelter deal for Scotland

Bus shelter manufacturer Trueform has won a contract to maintain over 8,000 stops in Scotland. The contract stretches over 11 council areas and was awarded by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (STP).

Trueform will provide a full range of maintenance services including routine, response and rapid response. The contract will be run from Trueform's existing Glasgow-based bus stop and shelter service centre.

STP currently uses Trueform's Elite bus stop range, which is modular in construction, meaning damaged or worn sections can be removed and replaced without the entire bus stop having to be taken out of commission.

Established in 1978 Trueform manufacturers all its products in-house at its Hayes factory in West London. The group has additional depots in Hertfordshire, Leeds, Chester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Dundee. Trueform employs around 260 staff in the UK

All in the head says scientists

Operators will not be surprised at the latest research into people's reluctance to use public transport. A new study says that potential customer's emotional resistance must be overcome before the battle to get them out of their cars can be won.

The research, by Dr Eleanor Mann and Professor Charles Abraham of the University of Sussex, is published in the British Journal of Psychology this week.

It says the main emotional reasons why passengers avoid buses are: personal space; a sense of being in control - choice of route, ability to travel at will; identity - the social status attached to car ownership, and past negative experiences of using public transport.

Dr Mann says: "It is a combination of utility considerations, such as time and money, and emotional responses to public transport that govern how people choose to travel. Different people prioritise these concerns in different ways. Of the four emotional responses, a sense of being in control would be the biggest challenge for transport policy makers because, by its nature, very little direct control over a journey by public transport is possible, and commuters are reliant on others. Demonstrating that the operators and services are trustworthy would give people more confidence in public transport, meaning that they are happy to relinquish some control."

Copies of the study are available from The British Psychological Society. Telephone 0116 252 9500.

Cameron speaks out on school buses

The Conservative party is to launch a working group on school buses in a bid to boost the numbers of UK children who travel to school by bus. Speaking last week, leader David Cameron said that school buses should be safe, clean, reliable and an "attractive alternative" to cars.

He says: "If you make it an attractive alternative then people will be quite happy to get out of their cars. But I know what it is like, you know as a parent you are worried about your children. You want to know it's a good, safe, clean, reliable alternative. Provide that and you can actually reduce congestion on the roads.

Davis Cameron: concerned about congestion on the school run

"In America, 50% of children go to school on a school bus. In this country, it's just 6%.

"There's far more we can do and it's a really exciting agenda and one that I'm determined that the Conservative Party is going to pursue."

The working group will be made up of transport and environment parliamentary spokesmen, and aims to provide a "much better range of choices" for parents who currently drive their children to school. The Department for Education says that 54% of primary school pupils and 32% of secondary school pupils use a school bus.

Briefly

Bus drivers in Norwich have been told to clean up their act. A leaflet handed out with new uniforms to First Bus drivers advises them to "wash regularly, wear a clean shirt daily and use deodorant." A TGWU representative says drivers should just ignore the guidance. First's spokesman says the advice is "a bit over the top".

The OFT has published the text of its decision not to refer Stagecoach's acquisition of Yorkshire Traction to the Competition Commission. The document can be seen at *www.oft.gov.uk*, via the link to the OFT's Weekly Gazette.

A Travel West Midlands driver has undergone surgery after being attacked by a passenger. Jasbir Dhaliwall, 47, lost a tooth and suffered eye injuries after the attack in Oldbury, Birmingham last week. TWM is offering a £1,000 reward to catch the male attacker.

First PMT has been warned to expect a 'summer of discontent' and accused of 'contempt and arrogance' by union leaders after pay talks were called off last week. Both cleaners and engineers are already engaged in industrial action over a claimed pay differential between them and their colleagues in other First regions. Engineers in North Staffordshire reportedly earn £7.52 an hour, compared to £9.25 for those in Chester.

Over 100 new buses are due to be introduced in south London. Operations director Mike Weston says: "These new vehicles have the latest design features and will give passengers a much more comfortable ride. There has been a 39% increase in passenger usage over the past five years and these bus service changes are just part of our response to the growing demand on the network."

COACHES

Bath open-top operator could be regulated

The only remaining open-top sightseeing operator in Bath is to challenge some areas of the Traffic Regulation Condition (TRC) being sought by the council.

If the TRC is implemented, it will open the door to other councils to restrict bus services but it is looking increasingly likely that the situation in Bath could give rise to the TRC being blocked on grounds of being anti-competitive.

A three-day public inquiry being staged by senior traffic commissioner Philip Brown next week will consider proposals to curb the number, emissions, commentary, stops and routes of open-topping. But the decision by Ryans to end its service leaves Bath City Sightseeing the only operator who will be affected by the order, if it is accepted.

The TRC application from Bath and North East Somerset Council, announced last September, has been proposed to belatedly tackle heavy competition by open-toppers, especially around Bath's Georgian terraces. Vociferous groups of residents have complained for more than a decade about excessive commentary noise, pollution and congestion.

Bath City Sightseeing MD Martin Curtis said he broadly welcomed some areas of the TRC application, and could 'live with' an order for commentary to be headphones-only, emissions standards which his fleet of new Ayats vehicles already meet, and most restrictions on stops and dwell at them.

"I have some concerns about the routes and stops proposed, since some seem to have been omitted - whether by oversight or design I can't tell," he told *CBW*. "But my main issue is the restriction on the number of buses - the council is proposing a maximum 10 vehicles, and no more than six per operator."

The senior traffic commissioner will hold a three day inquiry into Bath's open top services

Mr Curtis said that his fleet of 10 is already becoming overstretched, and by mid-summer he believes he will need more than 10. But he says the TRC may be contrary to the Competition Act, especially as it effectively bars any competition for his company's services.

"In 2000, the council tried to get a Quality Partnership for open-top tour operators, but that was stifled by the competition authorities. It was a shame, because the operators were prepared to go along with it."

* Mr Brown is holding the inquiry at the city's Swallow Lansdown Grove Hotel from Monday to Wednesday, May 15 to 17. It is believed this will allow time for the many Bath residents associations to make a contribution.

Commissioners lash out at DfT in annual report

The annual report of the traffic commissioners is harshly critical of poor resources and says there is need for changes in the Community Bus and Section 19 permit system.

The report - delayed for months - says that bus punctuality monitoring is near impossible given the "hugely insufficient" number of bus compliance officers, compounded by the Department for Transport's decision to second them to other duties for three months in 2004, and again in 2005.

North West traffic commissioner Beverley Bell, says that there are just three officers for both North West and North East traffic areas, forcing her to draft in personnel from GMPTE to investigate late running.

David Dixon, from the West Midlands traffic office, is even more critical: "The resource allocated within VOSA to monitor punctuality - just one Bus Compliance Officer for the whole of the Traffic Area, where there are over 2,500 live registrations - is insufficient to do more than 'scratch the surface' in identifying unpunctuality."

Senior traffic commissioner Philip Brown takes on the 'themed' transport market. He says that operators of fire engines, for example, are now asking for O licences: "I urge Buses and Taxis Division at the DfT to undertake a substantive review of existing legislation to deal with current trends in 'themed' passenger transport," he says.

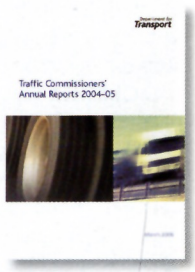
Brown also appeals to Government to modify the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act so that traffic commissioners can properly assess ALL vocational drivers through the Criminal Records Bureau.

Eastern traffic commissioner Geoff Simms backs comments about operators of 'stretch' limousines and other vehicles, who he says have applied for restricted O licences and thus are not subject to CRB checks, as they would be if local authority licences for a Private Hire Vehicle.

North Eastern traffic commissioner Tom Macartney calls for impoundment legislation for HGVs to be extended to PSVs: "Unlicensed buses and coaches are thought to be in operation, with a similar disregard for the expensive luxuries of tread on the tyres, functioning brakes and a driver with a current licence. Unlicensed PSVs should be subject to impounding now, as such vehicles present the potential for a mass casualty incident."

South Eastern and Metropolitan traffic commissioner Chris Heaps is harshly critical of the VOSA's decision to centralise services in Leeds, which he says was done without consultation and will lead to worse service.

Heaps has also called for fines meted out to bus operators for punctuality problems to be 'hypothecated': "I regret that any such penalties cannot be hypothecated



Trafffic commissioner's report: now available from www.dft.gov.uk

Bus Éireann was to get 90 Scania Irizar PBs.

Irish 90-vehicle Scania order under threat?

Confusion surrounds the status of a €16 million order for 90 Scania/ Irizar PB coaches for Bus Éireann, with transport minister Martin Cullen insisting the the order has been cancelled, and Bus Éireann insisting that it will go ahead.

At least a dozen of the vehicles had already been delivered, with some already in service when Cullen announced that he was ordering the state run operator to cancel the order, following complaints from the National Disability Authority that non-accessible vehicles should not be purchased. However a Bus Éireann spokesman has said that it is "too late to cancel the order" and suggested the possibility of including some accessible coaches within the order on a trial basis.

National Disability Authority chair Angela Kerins told *CBW*: "Bus Éireann had ordered the buses, despite this decision contravening Section 26 and 27 of the Disability Act 2005 and Part 3 in relation to the sectoral plan for the Department of Transport.

"I contacted the Minister for Transport, Mr. Martin Cullen who expressed concern at these developments. The minister immediately contacted Mr. John Lynch, Chairperson of CIE, who called me to say that in light of the NDA's observations he would be withholding the contract. He is arranging to meet with us as soon as possible to discuss this matter further."

At the time of going to press, *CBW* was unable to get a comment from Scania Bus and Coach on the status of the Bus Éireann order.

Documentation seen by *CBW* shows that the 90 new Irizars were to be deployed on front line express duties, allowing mid-life Volvo-Caetano coaches to be cascaded onto school work, to replace life-expired 20-year-old GAC buses, and to increase capacity in line with the governments requirement of ending the practice of 3-for-2 seating on school services.

for the benefit of public transport in the areas in which passengers have been disadvantaged by an operator's failings," he says.

David Dixon has also called for O discs to be phased out and replaced by the same system as HGV operation - specified vehicles, which he says would not present a huge burden thanks to the operator on-line service.

"The position in regard to buses operated under permits remains unsatisfactory, with (in practice) no control over maintenance standards, driver qualifications, etc. In any review of the system, permits should be for a fixed period, and should be subject to a 'light touch' version of O licences. It's ironic that those likely to know least about running buses are the least regulated!"

KEY FIGURES

	2004/05	2003/04
Total number of O licences in issue	8,614	8,377
Total licence discs in issue	88,574	87,282
Applications for new licences	1,317	1,468
New licences granted	1,079	1,221
New licences refused	83	88
O licences continued	1,123	1,196
Continuations not sought	186	343
New bus service registrations	4,562	4,581
Small, Large and Community Bus Permits	4,700	4,412
Of which Community Bus Permits	4	13
Public inquiries held	257	251
PI with no action taken	25	29
Licences revoked	68	53

Flanagan manages Paralympics

Specialist coach operators John Flanagan Coach Travel of Warrington is celebrating having run the transport for the inaugural Paralympic World Cup in Manchester.

With 600 athletes plus officials, it was a big task says John Flanagan, but together with sub-contracted operators, helped get the athletes both to and from the airports and to the events.

"I would like to express a very big 'thank you' to Lambeth Coaches and Cosmopolitan Travel, and their great team of drivers, for their invaluable help in making all the transport run smoothly," said John Flanagan. "All the care and consideration shown by all the drivers was greatly appreciated by all competitors and commented upon by the team managers."

Van driver injured

A coach carrying 45 French exchange students was involved in a collision with a Royal Mail van last week in Weston-super-Mare. The accident, at 1830hrs, resulted in the van driver getting back and leg injuries, and one 14-year-old was treated for a back injury.

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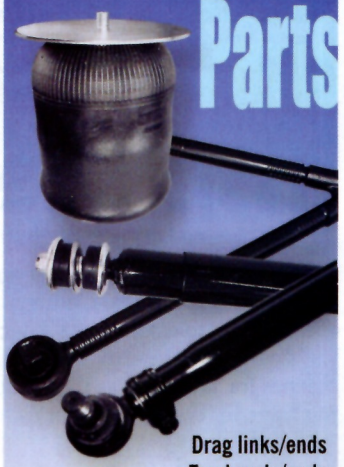

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IRELAND

CULTRA 2006 showcases Irish fleets

The annual bus and coach gathering at Cultra, Co Down attracts both operator and enthusiasts from North & South of the border to display their vehicles old and new. This years event saw the arrival of the first Ayats doubledeck coaches for Translink, as well as other new vehicles. *CBW* was there to record the day in pictures.

Dundalk based Halpenny Coaches have taken a number of Sunsundegui bodied Volvo B12Bs from 2004 onwards, and are a regular attendee at the Cultra event. Halpenny also operate local bus services in Co Louth, and have this year taken delivery of a Volvo B7TL/East Lancs decker.

Above: Dublin Bus sent up several vehicles to the show, pride of place going to one of their 20 Alexander Enviro 500 Volvo B9TL triaxles, which attracted much attention on the day. Left: Optare were represented at the show by the sole Tempo currently in service in Ulster. Translink have been an enthusiastic purchaser of the Optare Solo in recent years, and are currently operating the Tempo as a possible fleet replacement for older single-deckers. Left: Enthusiasts from the Republic traditionally travel up to Cultra in preserved vehicles, and this year GAC Citybus ZSI48 made the 90-mile trip from Dublin. These buses were built for CIE at the ill-fated Bombardier plant in Co. Clare.

Wrights of Ballymena have traditionally had a good presence at the gathering, and this year were showing a Volvo B9TL triaxle for KMB, a Scania for Reading Transport, and a Volvo B7TL destined for First Yorkshire. Right: Richmond Coaches of Lisbury attended along with their new 06-registration Scania Irizar PB, a 49-seater executive coach which is used for corporate hire and golf outings. Founded in the early 1990s, Richmond is a family run business, and aims to provide quality coach hire with attention to detail and focus on individual customer requirements.

Eco Warriors

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WORLD

Volvo gains further Brazilian orders

Volvo Buses has received an order for 64 buses to the Bus Rapid Transit System in Curitiba, Brazil.

Forty of the new buses are Volvo's bi-articulated 25m vehicles with space for 270 passengers.

Curitiba, the first city in the world to introduce a BRT system at the end of the 1970s, has expanded the system regularly and it currently comprises five corridors with separate bus lanes. Utilising buses with a high passenger capacity, either articulated buses with space for 160 passengers or bi-articulated buses with space for 270 passengers, the city quickly realized BRT systems could deliver rapid ublic transport at anywhere between 5-10% of the cost of a tram system.

So far, Volvo Buses has supplied all the high-capacity buses to the system in Curitiba. The first 33 bi-articulated buses were put into service in Curitiba in 1992. Today the city operates 163. The first bi-articulated buses were replaced after 11 years in service and the new order marks the start of their replacement programme. The 40 Volvo B12M bi-articulated buses are built on the TX platform and are powered by a horizontal 12-litre Euro III engine rated at 340 bhp.

The additional vehicles on order are 24 B12M 18.5-metre, articulated buses with the same engine. The bus chassis will be manufactured in Volvo Buses' plant in Curitiba and the bodies will be built by Induscar/Caio in Botucatu, Brazil. Production will take place in May and June and the new buses are scheduled to be put into service at the end of July.

Volvo is to supply a further 64 buses to Brazilian city Curitiba

Fiat CNG engines for Beijing buses

Fiat Powertrain Technologies (FPT), a division of the Fiat Group, has signed an agreement with Beijing Public Transport Company for the supply of 1,000 natural gas powered engines.

This contract is part of a co-operation programme between the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory, the China State Agency for the Environmental Protection and Beijing. The initiative is based on projects to support sustainable mobility in the build-up to the 2008 Olympic Games.

The order for natural gas powered heavy-duty engines is the largest ever awarded to Fiat Group and it is also one of the most significant engine contracts in the world. The engines, manufactured at FPT's facility in Turin, will be fitted to locally manufactured buses which will enter service in the Chinese Capital later in 2006.

Between 2002 and 2004, Fiat supplied Beijing Transport Company with 320 natural gas engines developed through a research programme financed by the Italian Ministry for the Environment. Since their introduction in Beijing they have gained a proven reliability record and made substantial contributions towards environmental improvement.

Fiat says its natural gas engines are among the cleanest existing today and also dramatically reduce drive-by noise from vehicles on which they are fitted. The engines employ a stoichiometric combustion process, based on a suitable air/fuel ratio, which uses an exhaust gas three-way catalytic aftertreatment system, they comply with the strictest emissions legislation.

Bombardier MITRAC System For Neoman

In the first application of a Bombardier-designed and manufactured modular traction system for trolleybuses from the German Neoman company the MITRAC 500 technology, also used in light rail rolling stock, is soon to be incorporated in 80 road vehicles for operation in Venezuela.

The Neoman trolleybuses are being built for the City of Barquisimeto, Venezuela, capital of the state of Lara, whose population growth is expected to reach 1.2 million by 2015.

The German-built articulated 150-passenger trolleybuses will operate over a new network of almost 30 km in length and are expected to carry 170,000 passengers a day.

Bombardier Transportation is a global corporation active in innovative transport solutions ranging from regional aircraft to rail and road vehicles. The cooperation with Neoman is building on the experience gained over last few years with the MITRAC propulsion system already used by other South American trolleybus operators (Quito,Ecuador, and Merida, Venezuela). The modular equipment comprises converters, control gear and wheel drives and is being manufactured at a Bombardier plant in Spain in conjunction with the maker's facility in Germany. Anders Lindberg, President Propulsion & Controls, Bombardier Transportation, has welcomed the adoption by Neoman GmbH of the MITRAC design which is also in service in tram and people mover rolling stock in Portugal, Germany and the USA. Delivery of the new vehicles to BARQUAS , which will be responsible for the new system, is due to begin in 2007.

VW has supplied 210 new city buses to the fleet operated in the Federal state capital of Goiana, in central Brazil. Bodywork is by Induscar-CAIO, one of the country's eight big companies in this sector

VW Completes Largest-Ever Bus Order

A fleet of 210 new city buses, representing the largest single order for Brazilian-built VW type 17.210 EOD-based vehicles, was placed into service at the beginning of May in Goiana, the capital of the central Brazilian federal state of Goias.

In a ceremony, characteristically (for Brazil) held in the city's Serra Dourada football stadium, Roberto Cortes, president of VW Trucks and Buses, based at Resende, north-east of Rio de Janeiro, emphasised the significance of the €25 million contract with the city which first used VW -built buses in 1993.

The new fleet additions are of the chassis type that has become the manufacturer's best-selling bus model which, in the first quarter of 2006 achieved an increase of 118 percent (over the corresponding period of last year) to 1,072 sales.

The new vehicles are powered by MWM six cylinder engines and feature (Induscar)-CAIO bodywork with extra-wide doorways at entrance and exit. They have now joined the fleet operated for the city of 1.1 millon people by Companhia Metropolitana de Transportes Coletivos - CMTC.

Brazilian bus activities by VW, which now comprise different models from five to 17 tonnes - and taking a market share of over 27% - will be further strengthened later this year when a new interurban chassis, the 18.320, is added to the programme.

EPR lands Georgetown University fuel cell

Georgetown University has awarded the contract to design, develop and fabricate a fuel cell specifically for heavy transit buses.

The contract goes to the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) where a team of specialists will develop a fuel cell power plant operating on methanol as a subsystem. Other partners in the project are the Center for Solar Energy and Hydrogen Research (ZSW - Zentrum für Sonnenenergie und Wasserstoff-Forschung, Baden Württemberg) and NuCellSys GMbH.

The program seeks to attain a Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC) system capable of approximately 60 kW (80 hp) net output. The system will be fueled by methanol, and will utilise a low-temperature steam reformer to convert the methanol into a clean, hydrogen-rich gas on demand. The reformer will be a third generation system designed with emphasis on simplicity and low manufacturing costs. The resulting fuel cell system, it is claimed, will be quick-responding, compact, and lightweight.

The Georgetown University Fuel Cell Transit Bus Program is funded under a grant from the Federal Transit Administration. To date, this program has developed five fuel cell powered transit buses: three 30-foot Phosphoric Acid Fuel Cell (PAFC) buses and two 40-foot buses. One 40-foot bus is powered by a PAFC power plant and the other by a PEMFC power plant. All of these vehicles are fueled by methanol and are series hybrid electric buses with traction batteries for energy storage.

For more information on the Georgetown University Fuel Cell Bus Program, visit *http://fuelcellbus.georgetown.edu/*.

Hispano delivers urban buses to Casablanca

Hispano Maghreb, the fully-owned subsidiary of Hispano Carrocera, has begun deliveries of Habit urban buses to Casablanca transport operator, M'Dina Bus.

The company secured its largest-ever single contract to supply 800 urban buses to M'Dina Bus in July 2005. Indian manufacturer Tata Motors Limited has a 21% stake in Hispano Carrocera.

The 800 bus contract is part of a massive renovation project of the public transport system in Casablanca. Hispano will deliver 200 buses a year over the next four years. The first 10 buses were presented to

The 200 new Hispano buses will be delivered over the next four years

M'Dina Bus at a ceremony in Casablanca, in the presence of Mohammed Kabbaj, Wali de Grand Casablanca, and Mohamed Sajid, President of the Casablanca Urban Community.

M'Dina's Habit buses are based on Irisbus Eurorider 397.12.27chassis and are all 12m long, 2.5m wide and equipped with 39 seats. They are powered by Iveco F4A Tector engines meeting Euro III criteria. Transmission is via a Voith DIWA 851.3 automatic gearbox.

Habit, a former European Bus of the Year winner, was designed by Pininfarina and meets ECE R66 rollover requirements. Its structure is based on steel profiles and employs galvanized steel bonded bodyside panels.

Hispano Maghreb was established in 2000 and claims to have become the dominant bodybuilder of luxury buses and coaches in Morocco. It has already secured business with key operators in the country, notably Alsa Group in Marrakech and the Ruiz Group in Tangiers are regular citybus customers. CTM Group, Atlas Rider, Satas and Supratours, have also become loyal customers for luxury tourist coaches.

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

NORTH

A **Nexus** customer services advisor has won an award from his bosses after his homemade guide to bus services was adopted as the official staff manual.

Bobby Towns, 52, developed his 'A to Z' when he started work for Nexus a few years ago to plug gaps in his own knowledge, and kept it updated on his home computer. It was so useful that it was made into a full-colour booklet, and distributed to colleagues.

Mr Towns says: "It all began as something for me so I could reference bus routes and their respective numbers, because when I started with Nexus a few years ago I wasn't sure of the routes in parts of Newcastle and Gateshead.

"I enjoy updating the list on my computer and don't see it as a chore. It's a real labour of love for me.

"I'm delighted with the award. It's always nice to get some recognition, although I'm surprised because I just see it as part and parcel of my job."

Nexus retail manager John Souter says: "It's always great to see people rewarded for doing something to help their colleagues to do their jobs better, and Bobby's bus manual is certainly a great example of this. He thoroughly deserves the award."

Pressure group Greater Manchester Transport Campaign is pressing **GMPTA** to install more electronic departure boards in the county. Peter Garvey, GMTC publicity officer says: "Other than at Manchester Airport bus station, no other bus station in Greater Manchester has such displays. Yet they are common in adjoining counties like Burnley, Lancaster, Chorley, Preston, Huddersfield, Bradford and Leeds. These displays are easy to understand, well liked by the public and undoubtedly contribute to greater use of public transport."

Michael Renshaw, projects director with GMPTE says: "For electronic departure boards to have the maximum benefit for passengers, we would like to provide live 'real time' information and we are currently working with bus operators to roll out a real time passenger information system on several bus routes in Greater Manchester.

"Ultimately, subject to the successful outcome of the trials at Eccles and Hyde, and further funding from GMPTA, we would like to adopt this technology at bus stations across the county."

MIDLANDS

A late-night bus service which has helped to cut alcohol-fuelled violence in a city centre, will be axed this month. Ridership has dwindled following the introduction of new licensing laws.

First say that the buses - known as the Nite Riders - have done their job and are no longer viable in Leicester.

The service started four years ago with the idea of helping police clear the city centre quickly at pub and club closing times at the weekends. But late-night violence in Leicester's city centre has dropped, and only around 130 clubbers are using the Nite Riders, compared to 700 in 2002. The £2 service will stop on May 21.

First's Andy Culpin says: "We can't operate the service any longer because of running costs. It's a shame."

Clubbers are now using black cabs and private hire cabs to get home. A police spokesman says: "The scheme has helped cut violence, but numbers have been dwindling, with most people leaving in cabs."

Arriva are investing £10 million in a new fleet of buses to keep pace with Leicester's commercial re-generation, which is deemed to be the largest programme of its kind in the UK.

Fifty-four state-of-the-art buses have been ordered, with the first due for delivery in the middle of June.

The new buses on order are eight VDL SB 200s; 14 Volvo B7TLs and 30 VDL DB 250s, making 44 double-deckers and eight single-deckers. The new vehicles will be phased in over the following three months.

The buses - which will all be equipped with carpet-effect flooring and CCTV cameras - will mean improved routes and more frequent services, say Arriva, as well as creating 50 new jobs for drivers and engineers.

Managing director Catherine Mason said|: "This is the single biggest investment in Leicester. We can see the potential for the city and we want to make sure we have a substantial bus

Cancer Relief and the British Heart Foundation will benefit from a charity bike ride being organised by Grettons Coaches of Peterborough driver Stuart Vonhof. The day-long ride to the North Norfolk resort of Hunstanton has already attracted 20 cyclists, many who work for Grettons – which offers private hire and home-to-school services. "Most people are affected by heart disease and cancer at some time," Stuart told *CBW*. "My dad died from heart problems. I just wanted to give something back to the community." Grettons is supporting the ride with coaching back from Hunstanton and a van to collect anyone who has to drop out en route.

Briefly

Lothian Buses is to pay its drivers to catch fare dodgers. Drivers will get £10 for every out-of-date ticket, and £25 for using a fraudulent ticket, or somebody else's. The driver is paid on production of the confiscated ticket. A Lothian Buses spokesman was quoted saying; "We are trying to stamp out the use of fraudulent tickets. It is an incentive for drivers to look out for them."

Leicester's 20-year-old St. Margaret's Bus Station is undergoing an £800,000 facelift. Over 250,000 vehicles use the station each year. A new electronic information display and enquiry desk will be installed, along with new toilets and space for shops and restaurants.

Briefly

Travel West Midlands and Birmingham City Council are running a competition with local school children to display their artwork on one of the city's major bus routes, route 101. Part of the city will feature the winning picture, designed around the 'Jewellery Quarter in Bloom' theme, a project to promote that part of the city.

Arriva has apologised to an 82 year-old who was refused free travel because her bus pass was not in a plastic wallet. Olive Smith was on her way to visit her husband's grave in Hinckley, Leics, but when she boarded the number 71 bus the driver told her she could not accept her valid pass and Mrs Smith had to pay the 65p fare instead. "There were other passengers on the bus," she says, "and it was so embarrassing. I don't know why she did it. Quite a number of pensioners got on the bus, and they were allowed to use their passes. But she wouldn't accept mine because it wasn't in the plastic thing. I was gobsmacked." Arriva said: "Investigations are being carried out. We apologise for any inconvenience or upset caused."

Stagecoach is using the backs of its fleet of new ADL Trident deckers to advertise the range of daily and weekly tickets available

service for that growth."

The company is planning two rounds of public consultations for the route ands timetable changes. The plans have been welcomed by council chiefs, with transport spokesman, Nick Rushton saying: "This is good news. Anything which means people, using fewer cars to travel is welcome."

EAST

Further investment in **Stagecoach in Peterborough** services aims to build on the amazing 20% increase in patronage since the services were overhauled two years ago. The introduction of 19 new vehicles into service during April brings the investment in new vehicles in the last two years to almost £4m. Fourteen ADL Trident deckers have converted the remaining city route to lowfloor, and a further five Pointer Dart single deckers - on top of 21 already in the city - have ousted older ALX200 Darts to Cambridge.

All Peterborough city routes are now operated by lowfloor vehicles, and half the fleet is now under two-and-a-half years old.

The Tridents feature CCTV, and are also equipped with Real Time Information technology, which will be introduced on the 'Citi 1' cross-Peterborough route later this year. Stagecoach has also made the 'back of a bus' sexy with a range of rear advertising messages that promote the range of daily and weekly tickets available. There are seven designs, all done by Ray Stenning of Best Impressions.

Philip Norwell, Stagecoach in Peterborough commercial director says: "Motorists cannot fail to notice these mega-rears as they follow our buses across the city and they will soon realise what value for money our tickets offer, especially when they see petrol approaching £5 a gallon."

Mr Norwell added that since the relaunch of Peterborough's services under the Citi brand two years ago there has been a 20% increase in patronage.

SOUTH EAST

Essex's first park and ride service, operated by **First Group**, has got off to a great start - over 1,000 customers a day have made a return journey into Chelmsford in the first three week's of operation.

"We are extremely pleased with the take up of the service. One of the main goals of the Park and Ride is to ease congestion and to encourage people to look at alternative transport. I believe it is fulfilling this role with more than 500 cars a day being parked at the Park and Ride site in Sandon," said Essex County Council's Rodney Bass.

"If the site at Sandon continues to operate at capacity then we will accelerate plans to extend the car parking from 600 to 900 spaces. I am delighted the Chelmsford Park and Ride has got off to a flying start and the figures so far are extremely promising, and show that there may be demand for extra sites in Chelmsford in the future."

The fare is £1.50 return for adults. A monthly ticket will be £30. Essex concessionary pass holders travel free.

The Park and Ride operates between 0700hrs and 1900hrs, Mon-Sat at 10-min intervals. The buses use a new bus lane along the westbound length of the A1114 Baddow Bypass, seen as integral to the overall success of the scheme.

Roadworks

M74 Hamilton
Until May 12: Contraflow and roadworks on M74 both ways at J5 A725 (Raith Interchange).

M8 Renfrewshire
Until May 10: Slip road onto motorway closed and delays expected due to bridge maintenance work on M8 Eastbound at J28 (Glasgow Airport).

M56 Cheshire
Until April 30: Lane closed on exit slip road westbound at J7 A556 (Bowdon).

M1 South Yorkshire
Until May 5: Road surface repairs. Road closed from 21:30 to 06:00 between J30 and J31.

M1 Hertfordshire
Until December 31, 2008: Speed restriction of 40 mph and narrow lanes both ways between J6A M25 and J10 M1 (Luton Airport).

M11 Essex
Until May 6: major resurfacing work between Newport and Henham. 24 hour 40mph speed limit, with safety cameras and off-peak contraflow

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon).

A39 Somerset
Until May 21: Road closed due to roadworks on A39 both ways between B3135 and A37.

A38 West Midlands
Until June 19: Bassett's Pole Island. Closed for widening to three lanes from 20:00 until 06:00 weekends between May 19-May 22; June 2-June 5; June 9-June 12; and June 16-June 19.

M6 Staffordshire
Until June 30: Speed restriction of 40 mph due to resurfacing work on M6 Northbound between J12 A5 (Gailey) and J13 A449 (Stafford South).

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Joint ticketing change moves closer

The Office of Fair Trading is modifying the block exemption rules of the Competition Act to make it easier for operators to work jointly on through ticketing.

Though the Act included block exemption from March 2001, by 2003 it had become obvious that the barriers and controls in the system were preventing schemes from starting. Now, a consultation paper proposes relaxing some of the rules to allow schemes to get going.

The main changes include:

- Replacement of the condition requiring revenue distribution for multi-operator travelcard schemes (MTCs) to be on the basis of 'passenger miles, as far as reasonably practicable' with a condition allowing any method provided (a) it does not create an incentive for operators to set their own fares higher than they would have been in the absence of the MTC, and (b) it does not significantly reduce the incentive for each of the operators to compete for passengers, and
- In relation to multi-operator individual tickets, removing the requirement for operators to offer both their own single and return tickets.

The changes have come after protracted consultation with a large number of operators and with the Confederation of Passenger Transport.

- Copies of the draft amendments can be downloaded from the OFT website www.oft.gov.uk under What's New. The deadline for responses - which can be confidential - is July 31, 2006.

More faith school cuts

Hertfordshire County Council is also considering withdrawing its discretionary support for transport to faith schools from next year. Northumbria Council is already holding a public consultation on the same issue.

Like Northumbria, Hertfordshire spends nearly £600,000 a year transporting children to 98 faith schools in the county, and reckons it could save £3.4m over the next six years by making parents pay.

COACH

Manufacturer	Apr 06	Apr 05	YTD 06	YTD 05
VolvoBus	104	33	231	198
Scania	59	17	121	53
Bova	35	15	63	33
Irisbus	14	24	40	69
Setra	14	12	40	32
Mercedes-Benz	34	8	48	20
MAN	8	8	17	16
VDL Bus	12	6	15	11
Caetano Toyota	9	2	10	18
Van Hool	0	3	7	5
Alexander Dennis	2	6	6	12
BMC	0	1	4	11
Temsa	2	0	2	0
DAF Bus	1	0	1	0
Transbus	0	2	0	2
Other British	1	0	1	0
Other imports	1	8	2	32
Total	296	145	608	513

COACH AND BUS

Manufacturer	Apr 06	Apr 05	YTD 06	YTD 05
Volvo Bus	128	116	443	526
Alexander Dennis	97	76	355	22
Scania	92	47	212	158
Optare	38	38	142	155
Irisbus	36	32	104	129
MAN	18	14	83	30
VDL Bus	25	28	86	61
Mercedes-Benz	37	28	80	47
BMC	7	8	45	43
Bova	35	15	63	33
Van Hool	0	3	7	5
DAF Bus	2	0	3	1
Transbus	0	3	0	12
Other British	2	0	5	0
Other Imports	48	29	96	94
Total	565	437	1724	1522

BUS

Manufacturer	Apr 06	Apr 05	YTD 06	YTD 05
Alexander Dennis	95	70	349	216
VolvoBus	24	83	212	328
Optare	38	38	142	155
Scania	33	30	91	105
VDL Bus	13	22	71	50
MAN	10	6	66	14
Irisbus	22	8	64	60
Mercedes-Benz	18	27	53	37
BMC	7	7	41	32
Autosan	5	0	14	0
Transbus	0	1	0	10
Other British	1	0	4	0
Other imports	2	0	7	0
Total	269	292	1116	1009

April registrations

Digital tachograph introduction has been held responsible for what appears to be a major distortion of the vehicle registration figures in April.

Although the coach and bus sectors may have seen substantial influence come into play with registrations up 29.29% for the month, the real effect manifested itself in the truck market where registrations rocketed by 110%, from 5,110 to 10,751, compared with the previous April – mostly attributed to operators trying to beat the May 1 'digitach' introduction date.

Christopher Macgowan, chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, said: "This massive distortion is down to the inept introduction of digital tachograph law. The legislation has been 15 years in the planning and was finally confirmed on April 11, just 13 working days before it became law."

Coach registrations for the year to date in April were up by 18.5% and bus registrations by 10.6% – representing 202 additional units overall – or a rise of 13.3%. The combined totals for coach and bus give a rolling annual figure of 4,400.

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'Final, final' warning for Notts operator

Lowes Coaches avoids suspension 'by a whisker' after catalogue of prohibitions. Andy Jarosz reports.

Nottinghamshire independent bus and coach operator, Lowes Coaches of Hucknall escaped suspension by a whisker, after a public inquiry heard that the operator had been given an uplift in its vehicle authorisation last year, when two recent immediate prohibitions had probably not been taken into account. The court also heard that six-weekly safety inspections were regularly being stretched into the seventh week, but this had apparently gone un-noticed by VOSA vehicle examiners at their maintenance investigations.

Deputy Traffic Commissioner Mark Hinchliffe said that he was minded to suspend part of the fleet for a number of weeks, particularly as the company had been given an uplift of two vehicles, less than two months after collecting two immediate prohibitions. "These were not known about, when the licence increase was granted, but had they been known, it may have been a different matter," he said. "It is a disappointment that the time gap between safety inspections has gone over six weeks, but because no vehicle inspector has pointed this out in the past, this time, I will give you a final, final warning."

Alan David Lowe, trading as Lowes Coaches and based at K&M Haulage, Watnall Road, Hucknall, Nottinghamshire, faced a public inquiry at Hillcrest House, Leeds, to consider regulatory action against its standard national licence, in view of prohibition notices issued, and an apparent failure to comply with undertakings.

VOSA examiner from the Nottingham office, Gerald Richardson Ray told the inquiry that after two vehicles had received immediate prohibitions, he carried out an unannounced maintenance investigation in January 2006, at the company's premises. He said that he checked four vehicles, which were generally satisfactory, although he issued two advisory notices, but no prohibitions. He said that the drivers nil defect reporting system "seemed to be working fine."

Key points

- **Deputy Traffic Commissioner hears that an independent bus and coach company should not have had an uplift in its licence after various prohibitions had not been taken into account**
- **Recent changes to the company's maintenance procedures were adequate and the CPC holder was hands on**

Regarding facilities, he said that the company employed one skilled fitter who could undertake minor repairs at the operating centre, but all other repairs and safety inspections were carried out at the contractors Mobile Truck & Bus's premises in Bilborough.

Regarding the company's prohibition history, he said that since December 2001, there had been a total of four immediate prohibitions and seven delayed prohibitions. At a roadside check at school gates, two buses, both Leyland Nationals had been issued with immediate prohibitions on April 27, 2005. LUA 324V had three of its 10 nearside axle nuts loose, while MDS 868V had insecure glazing and an oil leak. Mr Richardson concluded that these were clearly the result of inadequate preventative maintenance.

He reported that since the check, the two prohibited vehicles had been replaced with Leyland Lynxes, and wheel nut indicators had been fitted to all vehicles. It was also reported that one immediate prohibition had been received after that date on Volvo coach ECZ 9136 for an inoperative stoplight.

Under cross-examination, Mr Richardson admitted that the fleet check in January 2006 was as a result of the two prohibitions issued eight month's earlier. He said that maintenance records showed that all inspections were carried out at correct time intervals, and that there was a proper system for pre-planning checks. He said that he had found one item where a defect was listed, but there was no repair recorded concerning an oil leak on an engine. He said that this leak had been found at the fleet check and attracted a prohibition. "If this had been nipped in the bud, it would not have received a prohibition notice," he added. He also confirmed that the nil defect system was being operated satisfactorily, and that he had advised the use of a torque wrench, on site, which had now been purchased.

> I don't think this is a case for revocation, nor at the other end of the scale for only a warning

Alan Lowe explained that he had set up the business in 2000, the business was being built up gradually, and he now had a licence for seven vehicles, having received an uplift from five in June 2006. He said that four vehicles, three Lynxes and a coach worked school contracts every day, and that all his drivers were full timers, two of whom had been with him over two years. He said the licence uplift enabled him to compete for more private hire work.

All his drivers performed walk round checks every time they took a vehicle over, and one driver, in addition to his usual duties, gives all the vehicles a weekly check, with the fitter undertaking repairs that were highlighted. He said that a refresher course for all drivers on their responsibilities would be given by Paul Reddish, his CPC holder.

Mr Lowe explained that there was a contract with Tyre Force for a monthly tyre inspection, and no treads were allowed to go below a 3mm depth.

Regarding the most recent prohibition, which was collected at The Deep in Hull, he said that it was an unfortunate operational problem, which could not have come to light before the journey commenced. He said that one stop light bulb had shorted out and tripped the fuse on the three others. His fitter had gone up to Hull to check the vehicle, and as soon as he had taken out the offending bulb, the other three came back on. He said that it was an extremely rare defect to occur.

In reply to Mr Lowe, the Deputy Traffic Commissioner castigated him on the company's record. "Over the last three years, comparatively minor items have prompted warning letters, each of which you have replied to promptly, giving the sort of assurances that we wanted - so we thought we wouldn't have to worry about you anymore." He said that this had happened in 2003, again in 2004, and yet again in 2005. "I don't think the April 2005 prohibitions were known when the licence uplift was granted, but anyone listening to you would say - everything sounds right - and I might buy it, but your history lets you down."

Giving evidence the CPC holder Paul Reddish said that he had experience of engineering since 1985, ran his own company (Mobile Truck and Bus), and had every conceivable piece of equipment including a roller brake tester with a computer printout, emission testing equipment, and light testing equipment. His company became an approved maintenance contractor for Lowes Coaches in 2004, and advised on troublesome vehicles that needed to be replaced. One was replaced in December 2004, and the other two were scheduled for the next summer, but the prohibitions had forced an immediate withdrawal. "The system he has now is very good, and all seven vehicles are pretty good and trouble free," he said.

> **This is your final, final warning. No honey tongued advocate will get you off the hook next time**

Mr Reddish said that as CPC holder he met with Mr Lowe at least three times a week, and visited the depot at least once a week to see the drivers. He said that he used to employ the fitter himself, and therefore was well aware of his competence. He said that he was also a CPC holder for Patron Travel, which owned three vehicles.

Regarding the prohibitions, he described the fault in Hull on March 28 as an unfortunate piece of bad luck. He said that in a double filament bulb one filament had shorted the other, and that it was very unusual to have that sort of failure. He said that the oil leak had been known of at the time of the inspection but it was small, within the permitted parameters, and had clearly worsened after the inspection.

The Deputy Traffic Commissioner then adjourned to look through inspection records and on returning asked Mr Reddish why vehicles had regularly exceeded their six week time gap. He pointed out instances on individual vehicles, where inspections had been at six weeks plus five day intervals, and instructed Mr Reddish to book future safety inspections during the fifth week after the previous one, and not when the sixth week was up.

In a general summation, Mr Hinchliffe said that he was looking for fresh undertakings, and he was considering a curtailment of two vehicles for two weeks. "I don't think this is a case for revocation, nor at the other end of the scale for only a warning," he said. "The four useful undertakings I am considering at this stage would be:

1. All safety inspections to be pre-planned and never at more than a six week interval.
2. A nil defect driver reporting system to be used, and all defects and repairs being recorded.
3. All currently employed drivers to receive training in their duties of vehicle inspection, and written confirmation of this to be sent.
4. All vehicles to carry wheel nut indicators.

Responding in his summing up, Ian Rothera, counsel for the company, said that it was possible to demonstrate that vehicles were being operated as one would wish them to be. "Apart from the stoplight bulb, all vehicles have been in good condition since April 2005," he said. "They were not aware that they had been exceeding the six week limit, and this was not pointed out to them, but this will be rectified by re-jigging the diary system."

Mr Rothera suggested that a warning issued at a public inquiry would be viewed very seriously. "Because he has been called to a public inquiry, it has made Mr Lowe focus on the issues, and he recognises by his appearance today, how serious the matter is."

In delivering his verdict Mr Hinchliffe said that he had been swayed by Mr Rothera's final submission. "This is your first public inquiry, but you have a history of warnings and prohibitions, but the last significant prohibitions are one year old, the recent one being more operational."

The Deputy Traffic Commissioner said that by and large, maintenance arrangements were adequate, and Mr Reddish appeared to be hands on. He said that he was disappointed that safety inspection intervals had been stretched, but conceded that the company had had no warning of this. He suggested that had the Traffic Office known of the two April prohibitions, then the uplift granted in June may not have been agreed.

Issuing Mr Lowe with a formal warning he said: "This is your final, final warning. No honey tongued advocate will get you off the hook next time. There have been too many written warnings in the past, but there must not be any more."

Other decisions

EASTERN

Cambridge, April 10

Shahzad Hussain & Sharaz Hussian, Aylesbury
PSV - S17 - Condition varied/attached to authorise 2 vehicles with effect from 23.59 hrs on April 21, 2006.
PSV - S16 - Application refused

NORTH EASTERN

Leeds, April 3

First Choice Travel (Stanley) Ltd, Stanley
PSV - S14 - Application granted for Standard International licence 2 vehicles

NORTH WESTERN

Warrington, February 24

Pilkingtons Accrington Ltd T/A King Travel, Accrington
PSV - S14 - Application granted as applied for.

Warrington, March 30

Martin Peter Houlton T/A A1 Minibus Services, Warrington
PSV - S17 - Condition varied/attached limiting the number of vehicles which can be operated, from 12 vehicles to 8 with effect 23.59 hrs on April 7, 2006

SCOTTISH

Edinburgh, April 10

David W Allan T/A Allan's Group, Gorebridge
PSV - S14 - Application withdrawn

SOUTH EAST AND METROPOLITAN

Eastbourne, April 10

Taj Tours & Travel Ltd, Wembley
PSV - S16 & 17(3)(a)(aa), licence curtailed (ie the condition relating to the number of authorised vehicles be amended under S.16) by reducing the authority by 2 vehicles (to 6 vehicles) for one month (28 days) during the month of June 2006.

WALES

Cardiff, April 11

Alexander Hughes T/A Hughes Country Safaris, Swansea
Action: Mr Hughes is warned that he must comply with all the laws and requirements applicable to the operation of Public Service Vehicles.

Cardiff, April 11

John Hywel Grey t/a citytax, Swansea
- that the application proposing the use of Carlton Business Centre, Rear Of Carlton Terrace, Swansea, is granted as a restricted licence for 2 vehicles;
- that Mr Grey is warned in the strongest terms that he must comply with all laws and requirements applicable to the operation of Public Service Vehicles.

TRANSPORT TRIBUNAL DECISION

Swallow Coach Co Ltd
Decision taken by the Transport Tribunal following an Appeal "We have ourselves considered the detail and have decided to allow the appeal and to vary the order of curtailment from 4 to 2, so that the number of authorised vehicles is reduced from 18 to 16. Was invited to make submissions on when the order should take effect and on instructions, he said 'forthwith'."

FORD TRANSIT

Transit transformed

The Transit has been one of Ford's successes since its launch over 40 years ago. Martin Cole takes a close look at the latest version.

Ford's all new Transit received its launch at the CV Show in Birmingham. Its appearance heralds a complete transformation of the model, setting new standards in style, safety, power characteristics, durability and low emission levels.

The launch was promptly followed up by a ride and drive presentation in Frankfurt - where the key interest for journalists attending this event centred on whether Ford has done enough to keep Transit at the forefront of the LCV sector, a position it has held for the last 41 years since the first Transit was introduced and set the benchmark for the others to follow.

Changes to the Transit are more than extensive. They incorporate a full redesign and a move to Euro IV emissions technology with completely new powertrains. The new 2.2 and 2.4 litre DuraTorq engines offer greater efficiency, high durability and long service intervals combined with high torque output for driveability.

The overall package is more stylish, comfortable and safe with both vehicle and driver safety taken to new levels.

Designers from Ford's development team at Dunston were briefed to maximise saloon/loadspace capacity without affecting the payload - which has been a winning formula for the Transit to date. Everything else has been examined, revised and improved. Everything from the B-pillar forward has been engineered around the driver, with particular attention paid to improving vision in all directions, enhancing driver comfort and developing a new, ergonomic instrument panel with some innovative advantages.

Cab seating is very comfortable and supportive and there is sufficient adjustment on the driver's seat for Ford to do away with offering an adjustable steering column. Instrumentation is sensibly laid out and clear and the controls feel chunky and substantial. A highly practical and novel idea for making use of available space can be found on top of the dashboard. It features lift-up flaps, either side, which allow items like mobile phones or other valuables to be left on charge and out of site. The centre flap, which is more substantial, folds over to create a flat table with cup holder recesses.

Even the ignition key is an innovative item. It is completely sealed and rechargeable. It replenishes its internal batteries when in the ignition switch and they should last the life of the vehicle. A spokesman said it was difficult knowing what sort of remote functioning key to supply where replaceable batteries were concerned. Some customers perhaps only locked or unlocked their vehicles a couple of times a day but others, particularly delivery drivers, would have to do perhaps 50 or 60 operations. This meant some keys lasted three years before needing replacement batteries and others lasted as little as six months - so a rechargeable unit seemed the best option. It also has the advantage of being totally sealed and if dropped into a puddle will not cease to function because of water ingress.

> One of our dealers commented: 'the best light commercial by a mile just got better by a mile' and we felt that was praise indeed

Gary Whittam, commercial vehicles director, Ford of Britain said: "Customer needs have been a driving force behind the improvements in the new Transit and this is the secret of its success. We have developed the new model to satisfy a number of requirements but were very mindful we need to cater for the owner/operator who buys a vehicle because it makes a statement about them and their business.

"Customers who take pride in themselves and their business, will also take pride in placing their name on the side of a new Transit. We recently introduced the new Transit to our dealers - who are notoriously difficult to convince, but they were delighted by what we've achieved. One of them commented 'the best light commercial by a mile just got better by a mile' and we felt that was praise indeed."

Barry Gale, chief engineer, commercial vehicles, said: "Customers told us their Transit was a statement about them and their company, so it not only needed to be functional, reliable and durable, but stylish too. Additionally, they wanted a vehicle that was pleasant to drive - that it should never feel like taking a step down from a passenger car. We've

Above: Clean lines and extensive us of flat panels enhance the new Transit.
Below left to right: Lower window line and mirror position improve vision. Door mouldings provide loads of storage space.
Toolkit access is both tidy and secure

worked very hard on the suspension to give car-like ride and handling qualities and that posed significant difficulties in tuning it to perform anything like uniformly between being driven unladen and with a full load on board - but we are delighted by what we've achieved."

Drivetrains

New Euro IV 2.2 litre and 2.4 litre TDCi common-rail diesel engines are the first dedicated commercial vehicle powertrains jointly developed between Ford Motor Company and PSA Peugeot Citroen. The range is covered by six diesel engines, three 2.2 litre and three 2.4 litre, and one 2.4 litre LPG-compatible petrol engine. Engines can be mated to five- or six-speed manual DuraShift gearboxes depending on customer preference. Gearchanging is simplified by a dash-mounted joystick lever, leaving the floor area uncluttered and with easier step-through capability.

One of the most surprising outcomes of the engine power delivery is that the smaller 2.2 litre unit develops more power but less torque than the larger unit. For instance, the 115bhp 2.4 litre unit develops an amazing 320 Nm of torque - whereas the 130bhp 2.2

litre engine manages only (still highly creditable) 310 Nm.

Security

Transit builds on its previous success and award-winning security with a more comprehensive list of security features, engineered to frustrate and deter would-be thieves - which helps improve insurance ratings and cut costs for owners. Two levels of alarm are available, including Thatcham Category 1, while the Transit also features Passive Anti-Theft System (PATS), hood lock, cable-free doors and the industry's first configurable unlocking security system; customers can choose which doors unlock in which order, when selected buttons are pressed. There are three combinations to choose from at purchase.

Safety

Safety features include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Brake Traction Control System (BTCS) and a load adaptive Electronic Stability Programme (ESP). Protecting the occupants in the cab area is an important function of the vehicle's structure. Ford engineers were keen to improve and redesigned the front structure to enhance low speed impact resistance. Driver and passengers can be protected by head and thorax airbags. Minibuses have been engineered to comply with M1 saloon seating requirements.

Impressions

The first thing you notice about the new Transit is the radical and striking frontal design. The second, particularly on the panel van versions, is the amount of flat panel area there is on the van sides. In fact, the second one was Ford's most challenging aspect of the redesign to put into production because under normal build practices the outer and inner skins, when bonded, would cause such a flat expanse to bow. Given that all the models available for the ride and drive were pre-production versions, the build quality in almost every case was commendable. One or two very minor faults in trim application showed up but it was difficult to spot anything else to criticize. Front seat passenger comfort in vans with a load space bulkhead fitted was not brilliant if the seat was set back at its furthest adjustment. It would not let the seat tilt back far enough and made the occupant feel as though they were being tipped out. Move the seat forward one notch and the problem was instantly solved.

Stylish, practical and ergonomic dash layout incorporates useful features. Door handles and window controls are robust and well positioned

> We can't get the competition authorities to recognise that the car is the main competitor for the bus

A useful step is built into the bumper moulding to aid windscreen cleaning and ease some maintenance tasks under the bonnet. The moulding is sectionalised for easy, cheap replacement

Driver's seats offer a huge range of adjustment and because of their flexibility Ford chose not to install an adjustable steering column. Barry Gale said the control layout had been ergonomically developed for comfort and everything fell so close to hand there was no need for a tilt and slide column. The small steering wheel, which incorporates a number of control switches, has been sourced from the Focus C-Max.

Both the 2.2 litre and 2.4 litre engines run very quietly, the clutch is light and has plenty of feel and the gearchange lever feels very precise. Gary Whittam told journalists Ford had been testing the gearboxes under harsh condition for 200,000 miles. He claimed at the end of the test the gearchange felt just as positive as it had when new and the detent on the stick felt identical - ie, it doesn't appear to wear out.

The first of the new Transit's I drove was a 350 long wheelbase, rear wheel drive, medium roof model with a 115bhp engine and six-speed gearbox. It was loaded with over 500kg to simulate an average operating weight and was probably highly representative of the base vehicle most minibus operators would choose.

The handbrake has a strange feel to it which takes a couple of operations to familiarize with, but presents no problem and it works very well. Using the massive torque of the 2.4 litre motor there was little point in chasing high engine speeds. Acceleration was just as brisk by short changing and the effect of the high torque output while cruising can also be felt as under most cruising conditions there was seldom a need to drop below fifth gear unless steep inclines, sharp bends or junctions were being encountered. No fuel consumption figures were available but I would expect this engine to be quite frugal and it is likely to be one of the most popular in the new Transit range.

A maximum speed of around 170kmh (about 102mph) could be had on the autobahn but it was clear the engine had been limited at this point. Ford can set the limiter to customer requirements. The route itself took in a good variety of road types in both urban and rural environments - all of which went to show just how good the Transit's roadholding and stability were. Suspension seems very firm yet

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it manages to absorb large jolts from road humps with consummate ease and when being pushed along twisting roads the body roll is minimal.

Brakes on the test model, discs all round, didn't feel particularly powerful, especially when being used to check vehicle speed during a descent, yet carrying out an emergency stop produced very respectable stopping distances. Barry Gale said this could have been a pre-production setup glitch which won't affect customer vehicles.

Driver comfort and vision proved to be very good and the six-speed gearbox a delight to use. Combine this with the aesthetically-pleasing interior and it makes a very attractive workplace. Ford has put together a number of specification level packages with four levels of interior trim, where even leather can be included, and three levels of heating/climate control. There are also three options on audio equipment where the basic unit combines a radio and CD player, the model above includes a six-CD changer unit and the premium offering also boasts a satellite navigation system.

Interestingly, the running light selection switch has an extra position beyond selecting sidelights, headlamps and fog lamps. The 'auto' position sets the sensor system in motion which automatically puts lights on if the ambient level drops and will turn them off again if the level increases.

The front wheel drive Transit 300 medium wheelbase, standard roof I chose as an alternative was equipped with a 130bhp 2.2 litre DuraTorq engine which developed 310 Nm torque. It was fitted with a five-speed gearbox and felt like it could really have done with a sixth ratio as a fuel saving option.

The biggest difference in feel comes from the front wheel drive which makes the Transit feel very 'car-like' in its handling. It is also very neutral and there is no real tendency for either understeer or oversteer. Turning circle didn't seem to be impeded by front drive shafts but Ford's official figures don't differentiate between one or the other, so there may be no difference.

This model felt much more lively because of its lower weight and sharp handling and its higher-revving engine easily made full use of all the gear ratios available. Roadholding and traction gave little or no cause for concern; the model was fitted with Kumho tyres. Ford says it is fitting Kumho as standard because they have strong sidewalls and a high resistance to damage from kerbing.

> An old advertising slogan of Ford's said 'Transit Delivers' – well it still does and will continue to do so

Short wheelbase, standard roof Transit 300 features front wheel drive. The rear doors can be specified to open through a full 270 degrees.

Conclusion

Ford has obviously worked very hard to develop the new Transit to the high level it now commands and it will be a highly-attractive package across the panel van sector and a more able competitor in the minibus market. With a top gross weight of 4.25 tonnes it has significant potential as a coachbuilt body platform but its practicality could depend on what length chassis extensions can fitted to allow a sizeable body.

Is it good enough to maintain its market leading position? In cold, hard terms, the answer is probably no – if judgements are made on quality, performance and suitability for purpose alone. The Sprinter has caught the Transit and must stand level with it, each one having a few points where it scores over the other, but nothing significant enough to hang a business out to dry on.

There are others to consider too. Iveco will launch the new Daily in late May, Renault will not launch its new model until August, and Peugeot/Citroen don't want to move on an introduction before September.

Where Ford will score is in the brand loyalty. Transit is a name synonymous with LCV operation, there is a recognized association with the name and the aftersales and support network is prolific.

Is it worthy of holding a lead in marketplace? Yes it is. It's a British design with British engines and gearboxes. Unfortunately only the short wheelbase models will be built at Southampton, but the new Turkish plant where medium, long wheelbase and chassis cabs will be turned out is already building vehicles of very high quality.

An old advertising slogan of Ford's said 'Transit Delivers' – well it still does and will continue to do so, but the company knows the pressure is always increasing and will have to be on its mettle to stave off the advancing tide from Europe and beyond.

by Sue Reynolds

A bird's-eye view

Reynolds Diplomat director Sue Reynolds takes to the witness stand as the Token Woman and asks 'What is it with men?'

What is it with the men in this industry? Judging from the pages of this paper fellow operators visit some of the most fascinating and far-lung corners of the world.

And while other tourists and mere mortals enjoy strange countries and new cultures the operator is out searching for snaps of old British buses. The more exotic the setting, the more prized the picture. And you wonder why we, of the fairer sex, go shopping.

PS: I have some great bus pictures from Buenos Aires, and of camel buses in Havana... sad, very sad.

I was honoured to achieve Letter of the Week for my comments on Red Diesel and really thrilled to receive a toy bus. I am just not sure what to do with it.

Apparently I must not give it to a passing child. It is a model, a collector's item - you are right, it definitely collects dust. I know I am a heathen, but there are just some things I will never understand. A passion for collecting coach and bus models appears to be endemic among the men of this industry.

When you have a yard full of the real thing why fill every available space in your home with little boxed models? Maybe it has something to do with the fact that models don't get dirty, need servicing or break down - and you will never need to find a driver.

After 30 years in Birmingham, the Motor Show is to return to London.

The launch, for those of us who book groups, was a great affair. A buzz of excitement, the champagne was flowing and the room was full of... mostly women.

Now that should really upset Jeremy Clarkson and his cronies. At long last has motoring become a predominantly female pastime? Maybe this reflects the fact that the majority of group organisers are women or maybe the women were more thrilled by the lunch venue: The Ivy. The starter was magical, spinach never tasted that good when Popeye advertised it. And we all agreed the chocolate truffles were better than sex.

The London Motor Show, is at Excel, July 20-30. It sounds like they really have a great product. It is no accident that the dates fall into the school holiday, as the show is designed for families and priced in a way that will be very popular.

A family of four sees little change out of £100 to visit a theme park, and that is before buying an ice cream. At the London Motor Show the same family can pay as little as £30 (depends on the date of the visit) and that leaves a lot of change for ice creams.

The whole event seems to have been well thought out, with something for everyone, not just the petrol-heads - and we will have no trouble selling it. And I'm not just saying that because the lunch was so good.

Having dinner with a girlfriend can be a trying experience. Far too many restaurants have a problem with women eating without their chaperones - and I thought the days of that style of chauvinism were long gone.

So we were stuck in the corner, near to the toilets, and ignored. We reached the point when we could realistically have believed that we were invisible and my friend, more feisty than I, picked up her mobile phone, rang the restaurant and requested service at table eight. Increasingly I feel that organisations get so bothered about so many other things: new technologies, brochure launches, changes in legislation, etc, that the individual customer doesn't matter anymore

Our industry is not sexist in this way; it could not afford to be. All too often coach outings are the only escape for widows; indeed there are times when we might consider the male passenger to be an endangered species.

But, the dinner incident made me think 'How do I know that my customers are not stuck in a corner feeling ignored?' Most of them, even the most stroppy, would not have found such a courteous and effective way to be heard. We simply cannot allow a situation to develop in which the customer is regarded as dispensable.

Sue Reynolds is a director of Reynolds Diplomat

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to Coach and Bus Week, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Peterborough PE7 8FD

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

Fastway - how it works

We take a look at one of the most innovative bus systems in the country

PLUS The latest news from the UK and Ireland... a day earlier than any other coach and bus magazine!

Send your letters to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to: Inbox, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

Open letter to Ken Livingstone

I am a country lad, operate four coaches and have been operating and driving coaches into London for 40 years.

I drove coaches to London theatres while the IRA bombs were going off, persuaded the senior citizens that London was safe, and carried on coming. Again, with the recent troubles I carried on instilling confidence with customers to come to London, which they have. But now, Mr Livingstone, it appears you are dispensing with my services if I don't buy new coaches.

I oppose your LEZ on the following grounds; that of all the forms of the passenger carrying industry, the coach industry is being victimised; coaches are tested for emissions annually at MOT; planes flying over London pollute more than coaches; diesel trains have no emissions checks to be on the line; boats on the Thames have no emissions checks; and all the above run on cheap fuel while coach operators pay the full duty.

I find it ironic that I park on the Embankment for £1 every 15 minutes and I'm asked to switch off my engine, which I agree with. I walk to the embankment wall and what do I see? Boats chugging away merrily, blue smoke belching out hour after hour. The railway stations are the same; engines idling, producing more pollution.

By all means clean up London but be fair. Clean up the unregulated pollution. Turning away coaches is going to make very little difference - except to turn away the passengers which the London tourist industry wants.

Name and address withheld

LETTER OF THE WEEK

In your April 26, 2006 issue on page 4, you quote Stephen Ladyman MP as citing "the introduction of funding for Scheduled Services ... to cover the cost of half price concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled" as evidence for the government's support for the coach industry.

He must not be allowed to get away with this disingenuous claim for two reasons: Firstly, this support benefits the elderly and disabled and not necessarily coach operators. Certainly this is true if the principle contained in the 1985 Transport Act of "no better and no worse off" is applied to this support - I presume that it is. It is social support for the elderly and disabled, neither more nor less. Secondly, I am sure that the coach sector generally would not recognise scheduled coach services as coach operators. Long-distance scheduled coach services are (without wishing to denigrate them) nothing more than bus services by another name. Both types of operation are, however, public transport, and for this reason, *CBW*'s campaign should not let up and deserves to succeed.

Ian Maule, Ballasalla, Isle of Man

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

TOMS is even more complex

Grass Routes Coaches' letter is an eloquent illustration of the problem of the Tour Operators' Margin Scheme.

The solution is to do the calculations and see if the answer makes sense. If a coach operator spent £200,000 on EU hotels last year and paid TOMS of £4,500, that is equivalent to a 15% margin on the cost of hotels (7/47 x 15% x £200,000 = £4,500). This looks about right.

Grass Routes Coaches' letter also perpetuates two common misunderstandings:

- Customs say that day trips are not in TOMS, because there is no bought in accommodation or travel (the transport is in-house). Instead you pay normal VAT on the sale of theatre tickets.
- You cannot deduct advertising, phones or other overheads in TOMS. Instead you reclaim the VAT you have been charged by your supplier.

The main issue for the coach sector remains the valuation of in-house coaches. Customs say operators should use the direct cost of coaches (fuel, drivers' wages, depreciation, insurance & repairs, apportioned between private hire and tours pro rata mileage). The TOMS formula will then assume they make the same percentage margin on the cost of accommodation and coaches.

Every coach operator knows they make less on accommodation than they do on coaches and the ECJ has twice ruled that market value should be used instead of cost for in-house supplies (the decisions in Howden Court Hotel & MyTravel) but Customs are still refusing to apply this approach to coaches.

Martin Pooley, Norwich, Norfolk

***CBW* is the only paid-for weekly news magazine for the coach and bus industry. Each week the magazine provides a unique insight. Your views are always welcome. Write to the editor at the above address.**

5 YEARS AGO **The industry was reeling from TranBus International's surprise decision to close the Plaxton plant at Eastfield, Scarborough, which would result in 700 job losses, representing 20% of total employment in the UK coach and bus operations. However, an eleventh hour meeting in Whitehall opened up the possibility of coach manufacturing staying in Scarborough.**

10 YEARS AGO **Alexander, the UK's bus bodybuilder, invested £1 million to extend its computer-controlled production facilities at the company's base in Falkirk, Scotland. It included two CNC Unisign 3-D workstations.**

May 10 in history:

1922 **The 1,000th Rickenbacker car was produced. It was the first model to introduce four-wheel braking into the economy car class.**

1963 **Decca signs the Rolling Stones on the advice of Beatle George Harrison**

1967 **British Olympic triple jumper Jonathan Edwards born**

EXCLUSIVE

Five-coach trick

Scottish operator Gibsons of Moffat has traded up its entire touring fleet for five new Setras. Mark Williams went to see the launch... and to trace the Gibson heritage

It takes a certain amount of commitment and foresight to trade in all your front-line vehicles for new German tourers.

There's plenty of both at Gibsons of Moffat, where the third generation to run the business is about to be succeeded by the fourth, and the touring season seems set to be a profitable one. For touring is what Gibsons is all about.

There's been a Jimmy Gibson at the helm of Gibsons of Moffat since 1919, starting with the great grandfather of 26-year-old James Gibson, soon to inherit the reins from Jimmy Gibson the Third - one of the best-known characters in the coach industry.

But when the family firm started just after World War I, it was with stage carriage; a simple market route using charabanc bodies on truck chassis, which could be converted back to trucks when required.

"The market service took farmers up to Dumfries to the auctions, but if the prices were too high or low - depending on whether the passengers were buying or selling - grandfather would take them on to Annan," Jimmy Gibson said.

The service continued in this vein until 1923, when James Gibson launched a daily service from Moffat to Dumfries: "It was a great success - nobody had cars," said Gibson.

By the 1930s, with three sons in the family firm, Gibsons had grown the service to two-hourly and had to take on drivers for its six vehicles. Thirty years later, James Gibson the Second had taken the reins, and of his three children, Margaret and James were in the Gibson ascendancy.

"When I started in 1964 dad had five vehicles - a double-deck and four single-decks. My sister Margaret joined the firm in 1966, and we have run it until now," said Jimmy Gibson. But they had different ideas about what the company should be, and by 1965 had been lured by the glamour of coaching.

Through the 1960s and '70s - with the old Moffat-Dumfries service still operating - Gibsons coaches could be seen with Scots daytrippers in Blackpool, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and in 1969, Queen of the South Football Club were enjoying the Gibsons experience.

"I always wanted to travel, and in 1970 we took a 1965 AEC Duple to Milan. The customers paid £12 10s for the trip, and the voucher I got from the ferry company bought 200 cigs and a litre of whisky. Dad gave me £50 and I came back with change!" said Jimmy.

There was no stopping the Gibson tour machine by then. With Margaret manning the office, the company took its customers all over Europe: "At the time it was the only industry I could be in where I could get paid for being on holiday," quipped Jimmy.

The pattern was set for the next 20 years, the bus service continuing until 1998 when, under competition from Stagecoach, it was sold to the growing Souter empire. These days, Gibsons has built up a mixture of work, including its own tours and excursions sold from the quaint travel shop in town and contracts with a variety of tour operators.

> "At the time it was the only industry I could be in where I could get paid for being on holiday"

This is boosted by regular hires from private groups, businesses, and a fair bit of inter-hiring by operators who know the company's reputation for reliability and quality and appreciate its positioning in the Borders.

The decision to trade in six touring coaches - four Bovas and two Van Hools - for the five Setra S415 GT-HDs will, says Jimmy, make the fleet more manageable. EvoBus back-up will remove the concerns about surprise bills and make for a comfortable transition as son James and daughter Jennifer take the daily strain off Jimmy and Margaret as they "wind down" - neither would admit to retiring.

Left: Travelshop - Tucked into the streets of Moffat is the Gibsons sales office. Below left: Leather headrest panels give a classy air. Right: The Gibson crew gets the keys from Mike Beagrie, UK Setra sales manager, watched by regional sales executive Alan Slater (second from right) and Ewan Burn from Western Commercial (far right)

Above: Striking livery of one of the five new Setras for Gibsons' fleet

FACT FILE

The coaches Setra S415 GT-HD 'Comfort Class'

Engine Mercedes-Benz OM457LA six-cylinder, 354hp
Transmission ZF AS Tronic
Length 12.2 metres
Height 3.62 m
Seats 49, Nimbus, side-shift, seatback tables, nets
Luggage capacity 9.6m^3
Spec ESP, ASR, ABS, intarder, ComAir climate control, toilet, DVD

SCANIA K113 | VAN HOOL ALIZEE

Scania K113 Van Hool Alizee

Peterborough-based Grettons has an all Scania policy. An approach that paid off with this trouble-free Alizee.

FACT FILE

Chassis Scania K113/ ComfortShift transmission
Body Van Hool Alizee
First registered April 18, 1996
Owner Grettons of Peterborough
Since May 2, 2003
Paid £70,000
Major modifications Upseated from 49 to 53, toilet demounted
Current mileage/km 299,673km
Mileage in current ownership 111,438km

PROS & CONS

Costs last 12 months:
Total £1,000 (estimate)
Service interval Five weeks
Major bills (over £100) Drag link, two fan blowers, exhaust tail pipe
Average mpg 10 mpg (est)
Breakdowns None

- ☺ Timeless Design
- ☺ Passengers like them
- ☺ Doesn't leak
- ☺ Easy to board
- ☹ None

Current condition

Panels and bodywork ★★★★★
Still in excellent condition

Seats and flooring ★★★★★
Virtually as new

Driver area ★★★★★
As new

Engine and gearbox ★★★★★

Key

☺ Positive points
☹ Negative points

★★★★★ Excellent
★★★★★ Very good
★★★★★ Good
★★★★★ Poor
★★★★★ Very poor

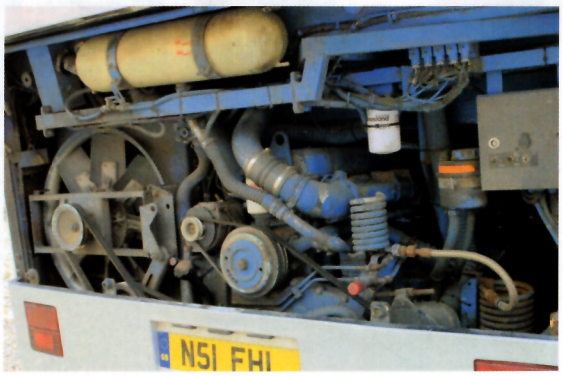
Operator's comments: Our niche is schools and local private hire, with few journeys over two hours, and this vehicle is at the top end of our fleet. Formerly owned by Johnsons of Henley-in-Arden, we bought it through Mentor chiefly for our private hire work. We will keep it another five years, cascading it to schools duties after three. It arrived with 49 seats and toilet, but we upseated it to 53 by demounting the toilet.

We've been all-Scania since 1986, and we find these vehicles very driver-friendly. This one has never broken down, and the engine is completely 'dry' having never been taken apart.

The Van Hool product is one we like; we used to buy Plaxton, but its problems in the 1990s made us change buying policy. We get on very well with Van Hool's service centre at Wellingborough, and with our local Scania dealership Truck East - which used to be Derek Jones Commercial. It's just a spit away from our depot.

Driver comment: Regular driver Penny White told *CBW*: "I'm very proud of this vehicle. It's a joy to drive and has plenty of oomph for the hills. I get on really well with ComfortShift, too. My passengers love the vehicle, which is very easy to board."

Above: Corrosion is starting to show at the lower edge of the mid-section panels. Left: Slight fading of the moquette is easier to spot on retrimmed seats. Below: Totally 'dry' engine has never been taken apart despite covering 300,000km.



Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

WOOTTENS OF CHESHAM

Few operators have committed to Plaxton like Woottens - with its order no fewer than eight new, full-sized vehicles.

The first-ever new Plaxtons for the Chesham operator are seven unusual Volvo B12B Panthers and one B7R Profile, all of which entered service this week.

The 12.2m-long Panthers incorporate a wider entrance which has been engineered so that a wheelchair lift can easily be retrofitted: "A number of features influenced our choice of vehicles for this major fleet upgrade," explained Michael Wootten. "We were particularly impressed by the comfort of the Plaxton interior. The amount of room is quite extraordinary.

"We were also impressed by Plaxton's ability to supply coaches which are DDA compliant and have been engineered so that we can install a front-mounted wheelchair lift at a later date. We worked closely with Plaxton in developing this specification."

Woottens initially ordered seven Panthers, which are 49/53-seaters, then later added the Profile, which is a 57-seater. All eight coaches are air-conditioned, and the Panthers are to a particularly high specification which includes DVD player, reversing camera, fridge, hot drinks facility, carpets, cruise control and Volvo's I-shift transmission.

Although these are Woottens first new Plaxtons, the company has in the past purchased late model used Plaxton and all but two of its front-line coaches are now Plaxton-bodied Volvos.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/B7R Plaxton Panther/Profile
Engines Volvo
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 49/57
Spec All air con, Profile with DVD, reversing camera
Supplied by Plaxton, 01909 551166

DAVID PALMER TRAVEL

Long-established Yorkshire operator David Palmer Travel has taken delivery of its second VDL Bus SB4000XF Van Hool Alicron T9.

The specification of the chassis includes the ZF automatic gearbox with integral retarder coupled to the DAF XE 340bhp engine. The livery complements the high specification interior chosen for Palmer's own 'Comfort Class' tours, including 42 reclining full leather trimmed seats, floor-mounted washroom with freshwater flush toilet, alongside a rear servery containing a fridge, boiler and storage.

Seat back tables climate-controlled air conditioning, DVD player and digital TV receiver add the finishing touch to the spec.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body VDL Bus SB400XF Van Hool Alicron T9
Engine DAF XE 340bhp
Transmission ZF auto
Seats 42
Spec Air con, leather trim, rear servery, floor-mounted toilet, seatback tables, DVD/TV
Supplied by Arriva Bus and Coach, 01274 681144

From left to right: Arthur Argyle, Regional Commercial Manager for Volvo Bus; John Duff Managing Partner of Reliance Motor Services; his grandson Gary; and Charles Moseby, National Account Manager, Wrightbus in front of the new Volvo B7RLE.

RELIANCE OF YORK

Reliance likes its Volvos. So much so, it doesn't run anything else.

A year after purchasing its first Volvo B7RLE, Reliance Motor Services of York has bought another. The 12-metre single-deck 43-seater features a Volvo D7C275 engine coupled to a ZF 6-speed automatic gearbox.

The Wrightbus Eclipse-bodied vehicle will operate six days a week throughout the year on the scheduled Easingwold-York service, and from April to September will operate on the Moorsbus network, a service provided for visitors by the North Yorkshire Moors National Park.

"Our first B7RLE has performed very well for us," said Reliance managing partner, John Duff. "It has proved extremely reliable.

"We've recently been awarded a government Kickstart grant to further enhance the service we offer, and another B7RLE was the obvious choice."

Reliance Motor Services has been in operation since 1929 and under the current owners since 1980. The new vehicle brings the total fleet to 10, of which three are coaches used for private contracts and local tour work.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B7RLE Wrightbus Eclipse
Engine D7C275
Transmission ZF six-speed auto
Seats 43
Spec Standard
Supplied by Volvo Bus, 01926 401777

Full Circle Enterprises – building a reputation

Full Circle's repair business is run by former coach operators. Is that why their reputation is growing? Martin Cole investigates.

Vehicle presentation is something close to the heart of David Simonds and his respray, repair and refurbishment business is rapidly gaining a strong reputation for high quality work.

Brought up in a coach operating environment, David knows all the problems faced by his customers and gears his business around providing services to meet those requirements.

David and his wife Karen left the family coach business, Simonds of Botesdale, to run a leisure complex in which they took a half share. David had worked for the family business for 24 years, and Karen for 20, but both felt it was time to move on. However, the waterskiing and associated leisure activities didn't meet expectations and they missed being a part of the industry. So within a year of leaving coaching they engineered their return having acquired a plot on an industrial site at Banham, Norfolk, to establish a repair and refurbishment business.

Full Circle Enterprises was formed in 2000 and undertook its first job in the newly built preparation and spray shop at the end of January 2001. By the following Christmas, the business had flourished to the point where additional land needed to be purchased and the building extended to cope with the increasing workload.

New equipment was purchased, including a Blackhawk chassis pulling system and jig which is capable of straightening any vehicle up to the size of large minibuses and minicoaches.

Further expansion followed with another large building which includes a substantial preparation area, spray booth computerised paint mixing facility and a fabrication shop where the company produces its own panels. The preparation area includes a new Josam chassis pulling system and will take all vehicles up to 40-feet in length.

Staff have all been fully-trained in the operation of the new Josam system and are capable of dealing with the most twisted or buckled chassis - effecting repairs on vehicles which would often appear unsalvageable. Two recovery vehicles are available to bring damaged vehicles in - a rigid Mercedes with a tilting bed for shorter vehicles and a 13-metre articulated low loader with a swan-neck tilt system and a tailpiece extension which allows a very shallow approach angle and is long enough to recover 18-metre articulated buses if necessary.

The latter vehicle is David's pride and joy because it can recover anything safely and without causing further damage - which isn't the case with many systems used for general commercial vehicle recoveries.

Business continued to flow into Full Circle, largely via word of mouth from satisfied customers. He was brought an ambulance to repair on one occasion and this has led to a major agreement with the East Anglian Ambulance Trust and Full Circle now gets all their repair work. Insurance jobs are also sent along regularly since the company achieved its VBRA status.

High quality repairs are as important to David as a high quality for finish - and he is 'a stickler' for proper preparation before applying topcoat finishes. He said: "Like a lot of operators, I appreciate a good job and things done properly - and we've been able to provide the facilities operators require along with the personal touch. I've been an operator so I know what they want and have a natural passion for the job. Unfortunately, it's a sad fact of life that we have to make compromises and work to a budget - hence we developed a menu pricing system to allow

Caption

Clockwise from above: Full Circle can undertake even the severest of accident damage and restore vehicles to their original condition. Spray booths are large enough to accommodate all lengths and heights. The Full Circle team - dedicated to excellence. Finish quality is all down to proper preparation.

customers a choice over the quality of respray they want.

"By and large, operators don't treat their service vehicles like they would the front line vehicles. We do a lot of work for Stagecoach, as an example, where we get a fixed price per vehicle. We don't earn much from it but it is good for continuity as it's generally two a week. The price we get dictates we can't spend long on preparation and this obviously reflects on the quality of finish we can achieve with the paint. I feel they are wasting money by not having the job done properly, but it's what they want, so we provide the service.

"We are getting a lot more prestigious work now from operators and dealerships - which is where we can excel. I'm never really happy unless I'm chasing higher standards. I don't suppose I've ever done what I'd term was a perfect job because I can always find something that could have been done a little bit better."

Personalised service includes free vehicle collection and delivery. David said he enjoyed collecting vehicles because it meant he was able to assess just what the customer's exact requirements were at first hand. Returning the vehicles was also a pleasure as it usually added to the job satisfaction by ensuring the customer was happy with the finished work.

I don't suppose I've ever done what I'd term was a perfect job

Full Circle now employs a total of 20 people and since creating its fabrication shop has found it can cut repair times dramatically. David said: "One of our biggest headaches was waiting for spare parts deliveries, parts being out of stock or the wrong items being sent. I found a local fabrication company which was prepared to produce panels for us and that was a major step forward. Unfortunately, they went out of business and we were heading straight back to the days of waiting around for parts. The answer was to create our own fabrication shop. I bought the equipment from our previous supplier and since we've had our own facilities we've been able to produce our own panels when we need them. It's the best move I've ever made. So many manufacturers or their dealers no longer keep spare parts on the shelf and that's no good to operators needing vehicles back in service. We make what we need, or can't get quickly, and can reduce vehicle downtime considerably."

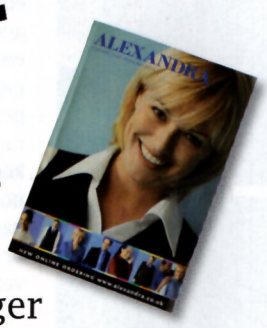
The fabrication shop's capabilities certainly helped the business develop quickly. It brought in a lot of work because operators knew they could get vehicles back into operation more quickly. It was particularly important to those with double deckers who seemed to find it very difficult to get parts supplied in a reasonable time.

Evidence of operators enjoying a good quality respray came from husband and wife team Trevor and Shirley Shore - who run ShoreLine in Bournemouth. They had arrived to collect their 14-year-old Van Hool T8 Alizee DAF SB3000 and were delighted by what Full Circle had achieved. To their extreme disappointment, the weather was doing its best to spoil things and it rained hard for most of the day. The couple were reluctant to leave with the resprayed vehicle because they knew, in the conditions, they wouldn't get far before all that good work was hidden under a film of road grime.

Because the business is relatively new and all the facilities the most modern available, achieving high quality alongside environmental and health and safety requirements has been a fairly smooth ride. David insists on top quality and pays his staff accordingly - offering some of the best pay rates in the area to ensure customers get the best job done.

■ For details ring 01953 887951 or 01379 688207. Mobile 07887 571287.

Two become one



It has been onwards and upwards for clothing supplier Prima since its merger last year with workwear giant Alexandra

It has been onwards and upwards for clothing supplier Prima since its merger last year with workwear giant Alexandra.

But Prima's MD Nick Atkinson says it's a natural partnership, with the emphasis as much on service as sales: "The coach and bus industry is a very important market sector for us," he said.

"What the bus industry is looking for is a high degree of service. What has driven our business is the ability to interpret operators' requirements."

Based in Millharbour, London, Prima adapts its service to suit the client. Small operations requiring just ex-stock uniforms with embroidered logos get a quick turnaround. But the bigger companies looking for something special can have their clothing bespoke, in a huge range of styles and colours, and with Prima holding size records of each staff member so that it can handle the annual replacement cycle without intervention.

During CBW's visit, the warehouse was about to dispatch uniforms for Lothian Transport, each set of clothing boxed ready for the recipient and clearly marked with his or her name. Along the racking, Prima holds a complete replacement set for each wearer.

"We only want to sell quality garments – good clothing could halve the annual replacement cost," said Atkinson. "And we try to add value – for example, with a staff uniform guide which includes washing instructions."

For contract customers – which form 50% of the £7 million turnover – there is even a facility for them to have their own web pages which list current garments and allows them to order on-line. Delivery, by TNT, is usually within 48 hours, and even bespoke, branded workwear can be turned around in a week.

"We can go as low as about 250 employees for operators who want us to produce specific garments, and then provide the fully managed service. For that, we issue a 'wearer pack' to the relevant depot, the uniform addressed direct to each staff member."

It's a service which has evolved since the early days. Prima was originally Uniforms Unlimited until in 1999, Mr Atkinson – its sales ad marketing manager – bought it with backing from Barclays. Growth has been consistent since then.

Even the last three years tell the story – turnover in 2004/05 was £6.2 m, rising last year to £6.46 m, and this year will be more than £7 m. It now has 42 staff including machinists to adjust off-the-peg garments and embroider items.

"The benefit of having our new owners is that we can dip into the Alexandra facilities and strengths when we need them. It's a big company, with labs and design teams, and we are benefiting from that economy of scale," said Atkinson. Upcoming benefits will include the complete catalogue on-line.

The list of current customers reads like a who's who – Nottingham City Transport, Go-Ahead, Lothian Buses, Cardiff City Transport, and many other big bus companies. But Atkinson says he cares just as much about small coach operators who are looking to 'brand' their product by ensuring all staff are sharp-dressed.

"There's no point having a smart coach if you have a scruffy driver," he says. "Companies should look at uniforms as part of the marketing strategy. A smart driver projects competence. Go-Ahead takes it so seriously it even told me it uses the uniform to attract new drivers."

Three sales executives cover the country for Prima – John Dodd in Ireland, the west and midlands, Barry Whitehead in the east, London and south coast, and Alex Black in Scotland. But Prima is just as easy to contact direct on 0207 515 8877, or through the website *www.primawear.com*. See the leaflet which came with this issue.

Expansion at Q'Straint

Q'Straint (Europe), the manufacturer of four-point, tie-down restraint systems for wheelchairs and their passengers being transported in vehicles, has announced three new appointments

Based at new headquarters at Whitstable, Kent, Q'Straint (Europe) has appointed Jonathan Eldridge as Sales Engineer for Southern England. With more than 10 years' experience as a sales engineer in the restraint industry, having worked with Reflex Safety Systems and Unwin, Jonathan is also qualified in electronic and electrical engineering, and will now be bringing this expertise, plus technical and design skills, to bear on behalf of Q'Straint customers and prospects.

"I am joining Q'Straint at very exciting time in the development of the company," said Jonathan. "The product base is second-to-none, the facilities brand new and there is a very healthy approach to customer service."

In addition, John Sargent has been appointed to the position of Accounts Manager and Andy Taylor as Warehouse Manager.

Even though Q'Straint only moved into its custom-designed headquarters - consisting of offices, product design, engineering, warehouse and production facilities - less than two years ago, the company's growth has necessitated the purchase an additional warehouse next door to the current premises.

Explains Mike Simmonds, Managing Director of Q'Straint (Europe): "The increase in awareness in many parts of the world about the inadequacy of most forms of wheelchair and occupant restraint in vehicles has led to a demand for top quality, proven products like our internationally-acclaimed QRT system.

"So we find ourselves in a position in which we are supplying, and in some cases educating, an ever-expanding market place. In turn, this has placed a great onus upon us to ensure that in whatever we do, we get things right the first time - a familiar phrase to anyone experienced in achieving ISO accreditation, as we are at Q'Straint.

John Sargent

Andy Taylor

"One of the major reasons behind our significant growth is that we treat all customers with respect. In the new building for example, we incorporated a dedicated customer service centre, tasked with providing the best product for a customer at the right price at the right time.

"For evidence of how this is working, look no farther that the success of its newest product. QRT Max, a completely re-engineered version of Q'Straint's market-leading QRT restraint system, has already been hailed as the most advanced wheelchair restraint system in the world. Easy to use, the system features single- handed operation, and is both self-locking and self-tensioning. There are no knobs or handles to turn to ensure that the system is tight - making securing a wheelchair and its passenger even faster, easier and safer."

Coaches For Sale

1996 Setra S250

48 Seats +double courier, centre sunken toilet, DVD player, Monitors, Fridge, Bunk, air con, continental door, Curtains, 8-speed manual, MOT

Finance Available From £245 +VAT per week*

For Further information please call Rachel on 020 8339 4823 Or email rmay@closeasset.co.uk

1999 Setra S250

48 Seats + Courier, centre sunken toilet, video, 2 monitors, Fridge, Bunk, Retarder, Drinks, Double Glazing, Air Con, Continental Door, 8-speed 4 over 4 gear box, Reconditioned engine with 6 month warranty.

Finance Available From £299 +VAT per week*

*Finance available subject to status and credit underwriting

*VAT at current rate should be added to all figures shown

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FirstGroup is the UK's largest surface transport group with an annual turnover of nearly £2.7billion and over 67,000 employees across the UK and North America.

A number of exciting new opportunities have arisen, as a result of a planned relocation of the Central Engineering function to Aberdeen.

TECHNICAL MANAGER
This senior role will report to the Technical Director/Chief Engineer and will be responsible for the provision of technical and legislative support to all UK Bus Operating Companies. Ensuring that the vehicles are reliable and safely maintained is a key objective and this position would be responsible for developing and implementing the Standard Operating Procedures to achieve this. An engineering or business degree is essential.

TECHNICAL TRAINING ENGINEER
This new role will report to the Technical Manager and will be responsible for the development and implementation of the engineering training strategy. This role will also be responsible for delivering technical training to the UK Bus Operating Companies to facilitate the achievement of the company engineering objectives. Engineering and training experience is essential as is the ability to travel.

SAP SUPPORT MANAGER - WORKSHOP AND STORES
This new role for a SAP Support Manager will report to the Technical Director/Chief Engineer. The role will be responsible for providing SAP implementation and system support throughout UK Bus Operating Companies and to develop Standard Operating Procedures in order to maximise system benefits and operational performance. Database experience is essential.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT
Reporting to and providing PA support to the Technical Director/Chief Engineer, Performance Director and Fleet Director, this position will also be responsible for providing administration support to Central Engineering team.

FLEET ENGINEERING ASSISTANT
Reporting to the Engineering Services Manager, this position will be responsible for the maintenance of the SAP database to ensure UK Bus Operating Companies meet agreed standards of vehicle maintenance. Database experience is essential

TECHNICAL ENGINEERING ASSISTANT
Reporting to the Technical Manager, this position will be responsible for providing technical administration support to the Central Engineering team.

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For further information on any of the above positions please go to www.firstgroup.com or contact Debbie at Debbie.slessor@firstgroup.com or Debbie Slessor, FirstGroup, 395 King Street, Aberdeen, AB24 5RP. If you wish to apply for any of the positions please send a full CV and covering letter, stating salary to Debbie as above. Closing date for applications 26th May

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You could be part of the team

New non-executive for Stagecoach

Stagecoach Group plc has announced that Sir George Mathewson will join the board of the company as a non-executive director with effect from June 8.

Sir George was chairman of The Royal Bank of Scotland Group plc until his retirement on April 28. Sir George is currently an advisor to the Royal Bank and also a director of the Scottish Investment Trust.

Commenting on Sir George's appointment, Robert Speirs, chairman said: "We are delighted that Sir George Mathewson is joining the Board. He brings a formidable range of skills to Stagecoach Group, including substantial experience of working with major UK-listed companies."

Sir George Mathewson was educated at Perth Academy and graduated from St Andrews University (BSc, PhD). Sir George has a wide background in finance, technology and management. He joined The Royal Bank of Scotland Group in 1987 as director of strategic planning and development and in 1990 was appointed deputy group chief executive. In January 1992, he was appointed group chief executive and, following the acquisition of NatWest, Sir George was appointed executive deputy chairman in March 2000. In April 2001, Sir George was appointed chairman of The Royal Bank of Scotland Group.

Sir George is a director of the Scottish Investment Trust plc. In November 2001, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Institute of International Finance and in June 2005, he became President of the International Monetary Conference. Sir George joined the Advisory Committee of Bridgepoint Capital Limited in January 2004. From 1981 to 1987, Sir George was chief executive of the Scottish Development Agency. Prior to 1972 he spent five years in the United States as a professional engineer with Bell Aerospace during which time he graduated MBA.

NVQ's for Plymouth drivers

Plymouth Citybus has recently presented Pass certificates to its initial group of 10 drivers attaining NVQ Level 2 status in Road Passenger Transport.

Speaking at the special ceremony that took place at the Company's Milehouse Head Office, MD Mr John Ackroyd said he was delighted with both the enthusiasm and professionalism that the staff had shown during the training process and looked forward to presenting many more such awards to Citybus staff in the future. John said: "We are very proud of them. We believe that NVQ sends a clear signal to public transport users in the Plymouth area that Citybus firmly places the customer as our number one priority."

Also honoured at the Ceremony were the winners of the recent Company Heat for the UK Bus Driver of the Year competition.

New safer travel co-ordinator appointed

Travel West Midlands has appointed a new Safer Travel co-ordinator to further drive forward the award-winning and industry benchmark - Operation Safer Travel.

Tony Dallison, 39, joins TWM's Corporate Affairs Department from TWM's West Bromwich garage where he is currently Service Quality Manager. Tony started with Travel West Midlands in 1988 and has worked through various roles in his 18 years with the company.

Stuart Henry, Divisional Corporate Affairs Manager for TWM said: "Tony's role will be to drive our partnership forward and build on the past successes we've had through OST. In the future we aim to focus strongly on criminal prosecutions, establishing new partners, introducing innovative ideas and improving the ways in which we communicate results both internally to staff and externally to our customers. OST has been important over the past seven years in deterring all types of crime and we are sure this will continue with the help of Tony's dedication and enthusiasm."

Tony begins his new role on May 15 and will be based at the UK Bus Division's Bordesley Headquarters in Birmingham.

TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN FSU

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Candidates for this senior transport position must have a degree standard of education, appropriate experience at a senior level together with excellent organisational and communication skills and advanced IT competency and a proven track record in providing safe operations.

For an information pack and details of how to apply for these exciting positions email consultancy@fta.co.uk. Closing date for applications 19 May 2006, initial interviews will be held in the UK during week commencing 23 May.

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Salary up to £50,000 net per annum + Participation in Bonus Scheme + Site Housing Allowance

Reporting to the Senior Transportation Services Manager this key position has responsibility for the delivery of personnel transport operations and vehicle maintenance facility and ancillary operations.

Candidates must have experience at a senior level of the management of passenger carrying services including both taxi and coach operations. The successful candidate will be able to demonstrate a good standard of general education with appropriate qualifications.

Excellent organisational and customer interface skills together with the ability to communicate well at all levels and a high standard of IT competency are necessary attributes for this post.

For both posts Candidates must be able to demonstrate the ability to communicate with the Client at a senior and strategic level. Russian language skills, while not essential, would be viewed favourably. Positions are rotational, and/or Site based . Total package includes support with accommodation and return flights to the country of origin

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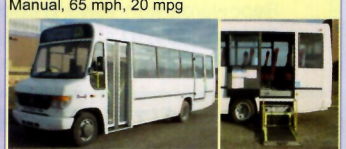

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2000 X REG FORD TRANSIT 150 DIESEL

5 SPEED MANUAL, LONG WHEEL BASE, PAS, HIGH ROOF, HIGH SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH LOW STEP, 8 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING FOR W/ CHAIRS, RICON TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, LOW MILES, 36,000 MILES.

X REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL, 5 SPEED, PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, HIGH ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

51 REG, IVECO

40.C11 2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 16 LUXURY HIGH BACK SEATS. SLAM DOOR FRONT ENTRANCE WITH LOW STEP, HIGH ROOF, BONDED WINDOWS , LOW MILES 75,000 KMS ONE OWNER EX NHS TRUST.

1999 T REG IVECO 49.10

TURBO DAILY, LONG WHEEL BASE, 5 SPEED , PAS, HIGH ROOF POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY WITH STEP,16 HIGH BACK SEATS,UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 65,000 MILES,

PP 1992 TOYOTA OPTIMO 2,

MOT TESTED NOVEMBER 2006 21 SEATER PLUS TABLE, POWER DOOR, DROP WELL BOOT, OVERHEAD STORAGE WITH FORCED AIR AND READING LAMPS. HIGH BACK RECLINERS FITTED WITH SEAT BELTS, STEREO, EXCELLENT BUY AT ONLY £5995.00 PLUS VAT

T REG 1999 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 15 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, SLIDING DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 48,000 MILES

Y REG 2001 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5TDI AUTOMATIC, POWERED STEERING, MWB, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 5 SEATS PLUS 1 WHEELCHAIR, UNWIN TRACKING, WITH SIDE MOUNTED RICON TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, MINT CONDITION, 33,000 MILES

X REG 2001 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, PAS, 12 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 63,000 MILES ONE REMAINING

2000 V REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL, 5 SPEED, PAS, L W B, EXCEL CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

2001 51 REG RENAULT MASTER

MM33, 2.2 DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 7 SEATS PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, LOW MILES,

2001 Y REG RENAULT MASTER

MM33, 2.2 DCI, 5 SPEED, PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 7 SEATS PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER.

2001 Y REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35 2.5, 5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, STANFORD PTS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 12 HIGH BACK SEATS OR 8 PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIRS RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 6000 MILES ONLY.

V REG VOLKSWAGEN LT46

TURBO DIESEL, PAS, LWB, WHITACRES CONVERSION, LARGE POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF, 16 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFFE UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, COIF.

52 REG 2003 RENAULT MASTER

LM35, 2.5, 5 SPEED, PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 16 HIGH BACK M2 TESTED SEATS PLUS DRIVER, MINT CONDITION, ONE OWNER, 6,000 MILES,

2003 03 REG RENAULT MASTER,

MM33, 2.2 DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP,11 SEATS OR 6 PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, VERY LOW MILES,

2001 Y REG FORD TRANSIT

NEW SHAPE ,330,DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, MWB, PAS, MEDIUM ROOF SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP,8 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR W/CHAIRS RICON TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, LOW MILES 33,000 MILES

02 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

2.5 TURBO DIESEL 109 BHP, PAS, LUXURY SPEC FRANK GUY CONVERSION, TWIN SLD'S, TINTED WINDOWS, 10 HIGH BACK SEATS,OVER HEAD LOCKERS, WITH AIR & LAMPS REAR STORAGE AREA, EBERSPACHER CLIMATE CONTROL, EX DEMO 16,000 MILES

2000 X REG RENAULT MASTER

SM33, 2.2 DCI, 5 SPEED, PAS, SWB, ATLAS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS OR 4 PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER LOW MILES CHOICE OF TWO,

NEW 06 REG, IVECO 40.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 14 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. DOUBLE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT, SIDE-LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, M2 FLOOR, LOTS OF SPACE, DELIVERY MILEAGE ONLY, IN STOCK

NEW 06 REG, IVECO

40.C13 2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 14 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. DOUBLE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT ,SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, M2 FLOOR, LOT'S OF SPACE, DELIVERY MILEAGE ONLY, IN STOCK

NEW UN REGISTERED VOLKSWAGEN LT46

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1996 R REG PP FORD TRANSIT

190 LWB, 2.5, MELLOR CONVERSION, LONG WHEEL BASE HIGH ROOF 14 SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S PLUS 1 WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, PLS TAIL LIFT, FRONT ENTRY DOOR WITH FOLD DOWN STEP, EX CHARITY, LOW MILEAGE 58,000 miles

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04 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

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1999 T REG PEUGEOT BOXER

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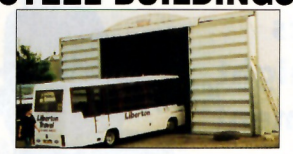

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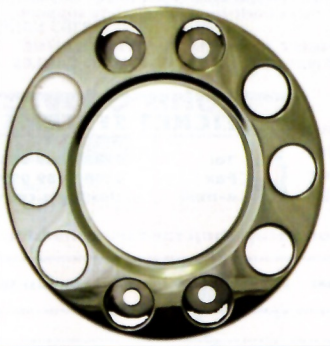

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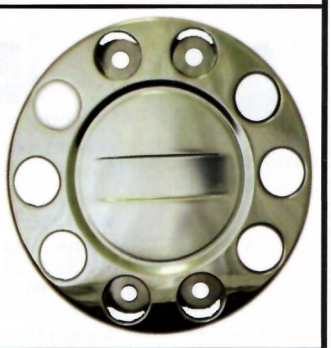

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From Essex with love...

Kevin Waller of Kiwi Executive Travel has sent us a bus ticket. A bus ticket to travel on a Routemaster. In New Zealand.

"I am confident this may be the furthest flung RML," he says, confident, in fact, that the only thing south of NZ is Antarctica. Needless to say it is one of Peter Newman's stock 'deckers, exported by Ensign last year complete with its original number, destination blinds, adverts and some graffiti.

Enthusiasts will be pleased to hear that absolutely nothing has been altered, not even the graffiti. If you're heading for Napier, a half-hour aboard will set you back about £2.

Dunster or dumpster?

Council attitudes to coach parking vary depending on where you are, but this picture from correspondent Roger

FREE PARKING FOR COACHES ONLY
THIS SPACE MUST BE KEPT CLEAR FOR COACHES AT ALL TIMES.
CARS FOUND PARKING IN THIS AREA WILL RECIEVE AN EXCESS CHARGE OF £50.00
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Norman seems to suggest that all is not well in West Somerset....

The row of coach parking bays at Dunster Steep is a real boon, with toilets provided and easy access to the village of Dunster. The legend on the bays reads 'This space must be kept clear for coaches at all times': but it appears that either the local fleet has hit a new low in terms of passenger comfort, or recycling has taken precedence in the council's new strategy.

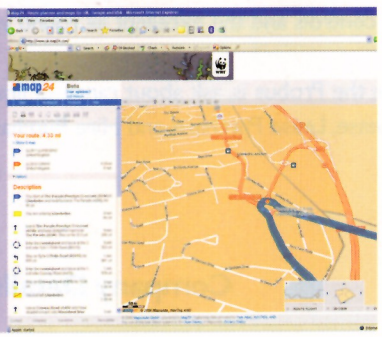
What we want to know is whether the council is paying its own parking fees of £1 for two hours and upwards on the tastefully-liveried fleet of wheelie bins, or whether it simply fines itself the £50 levy it threatens against cars?

Two minute interview

Full name Robert Mcleod
Age 56 and still counting.....
Occupation Managing director Arriva Bus & Coach
Will there be more passengers on coaches and buses in the future? Yes
If 'yes', who will they be, and if 'no,' why not? They will be people with no faster means of getting about, and those who value our children's futures.
Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? The introduction of digital tachographs. It has been an example of amateur lawmaking and, an insult to the working lives of ordinary, law-abiding people.
Give the industry's business managers 22 words of helpful advice If you give your word – keep it. Quality wins in the end. Love thy neighbour and finally... has anyone seen my camel?
When you got your first job in the industry, was it love at first sight? No. It still isn't; but then, what is love?
Which vehicle – coach, bus, motorcycle or car – do you love the most, and why? The Plymouth Baccaruda – the guy made 10 attempts to mispronounce it
If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute? Vagueness
At your ideal dinner party, what would be the main course? Food
And in your glass? Wine

Googled...

www.map24.co.uk There are quite a few on-line route planners, not least of which are the RAC website and Michelin. But Map24 really does the business. As with all route planners, you just input your starting and finishing point, together with any interim destinations, and it works out the optimum route. Map 24 lets you set speed preferences. What sets Map 24 apart is that the route can then de displayed in awesome 3D together with information about the hills en route. You can even have a 'fly through' version of the journey. Just take a look...



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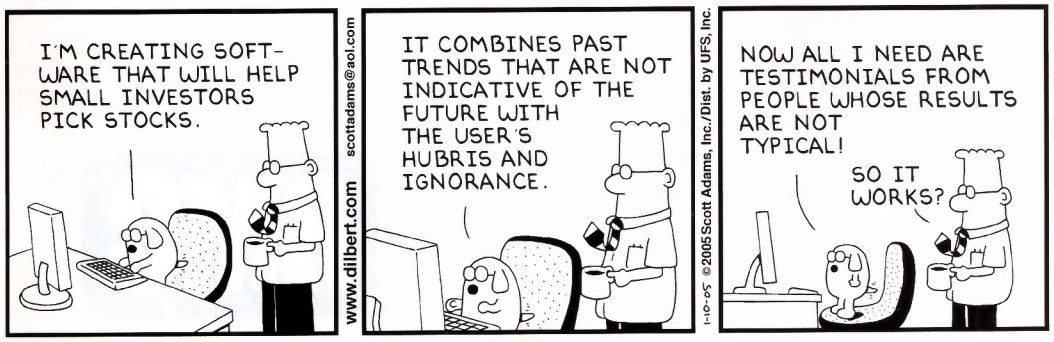
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The BMC Probus 850 offers unbeatable value for money in the 35 seat midi luxury coach sector. It has the performance and economy you would expect from a Cummins ISBe 220 hp engine and ZF (manual or auto) gearbox but standard features that might surprise you given the list price.

Drivers haven't been forgotten, they will appreciate an adjustable steering column, air suspended seat, easy reach controls and the excellent all round visibility.

To find out just how affordable the Probus is, ask about range of finance packages available including Operating Lease, Lease Purchase, and Hire Purchase.

Standard Specification

Cummins Euro 3, 6 cylinder 220 ps
ZF Manual or Auto Gearbox
Disc brakes all round, ABS/ASR
Meritor axles
Air-conditioning
TV/DVD/Stereo system
Carpet and Curtains
4.9m^3 of luggage space
35 seats
Power plug door
Cool box
Telma Retarder

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BMC